

YOUNG MUSGRAVE.

“Touching sacrifice: of thy worldly possessions give all, even to the spoiling of thy goods; for thus teaches our Lord Christ, and our blessed master San Francesco. If a poor person, more poor than thou, would have thy habit, which it is not permitted by the rule of the order to give, let him take it from thee: so wilt thou do no wrong; but thy life, which is not thine, give not: it is but given to thee for God’s service; thou canst not take it up, neither canst thou lay it down. This rule obey if thou wouldest be free from presumption. For our Lord Christ alone, whose life was His own, hath power and privilege to give it away.”—*Sermons, BB. Frati Ginepro e Lausdeo, dei Frati Minori.*

YOUNG MUSGRAVE.

BY

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“No man can redeem his brother.”—Ps. xlix. 7.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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YOUNG MUSGRAVE.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE FAMILY.

It would be difficult to say how Penninghame Castle had got that imposing name. It was an old house standing almost on the roadside, at least at the termination of a rough country road leading from the village, which widened into a square space at the side of the house. The village road was lined with trees, and it pleased the Musgraves to believe that it had been in happier days the avenue to their ancient dwelling, while the rough square at the end had been the courtyard. The place itself consisted of a small mansion not important enough to be very distinctive in architecture, built on to the end of an old hall, the

only remaining portion of a much older and greater house. This hall was entered directly by a great door of heavy oak, from which a slope of ancient causeway descended into the road below—an entrance which was the only thing like a castle in the whole *ensemble*; though it ought to have led to an ancient gateway and portcullis rather than to the great door generally wide open, through which, according to the story, a horseman once entered to scare the guests at their feast and defy the master at the head of the table. The hall was not used for such festive purposes now, nor threatened by such warlike intruders. It had known evil fortune in its day and had been degraded into a barn, its windows blocked up, its decorations destroyed—but had come to life again for the last fifty years and had come back to human use, though no longer as of old. Round the corner was the front of the old mansion, built in that pallid grey stone, which adds a sentiment of age, like the ashy paleness of very old people, to the robust antiquity of mason-work more lasting than any that is done now. Successive squires had nibbled at this old front, making windows there and doorways here: windows which cut through the string-courses above, and a prim Georgian front door,

not even in the centre of the old arched entrance which had been filled up, which gave a certain air of disreputable irregularity to the pale and stern old dwelling-place. Ivy and other clinging growths fortunately hid a great deal of this, and added importance to the four great stacks of chimneys, which, mantled in its short, large leaves and perpetual greenness, looked like turrets, and dignified the house. A lake behind somewhat coldly blue, and a great hill in front somewhat coldly green, showed all the features of that north country which was not far enough north for the wild vigour and vivifying tints of brown bracken and heather. The lake came closely up in a little bay behind the older part of the house where there was a rocky harbour for the boats of the family ; and between this little bay and the grey walls was the flower-garden, old-fashioned and bright, though turned to the unkindly east. Beyond this was a kind of broken park with some fine trees and a great deal of rough underwood, which stretched along the further shore of the lake and gave an air of dignity to the dwelling on that side. This was still called “the Chase” as the house was called the Castle, in memory it might be supposed of better days. The Musgraves had been Cavaliers, and

had wasted their substance in favour of the Charleses, and their lands had been ravaged, their park broken up into fields, their avenue made a common road, half by hostile neighbours, half by vulgar intrusion, in the days when the Revolutionists had the upper hand. So they said, at least, and pleas of this kind are respected generally, save by the very cynical. Certainly the present occupants of the house believed it fervently, and so did the village; and if it was nothing more it was a great comfort and support to the family, and made them regard the rude approach to "the Castle" with forbearance. The public right of way had been established in those stormy times. It was a sign even of the old greatness of the house. It was better than trim lawns and smiling gardens, which would have required a great deal of keeping up. It was, however, a family understanding that the first Musgrave who made a rich marriage, or who in any other way became a favourite of fortune, should by some vague means—an act of parliament or otherwise—reclaim the old courtyard and avenue, and plant a pair of magnificent gates between the castle and the village: also buy back all the old property; also revive the title of Baron of Penninghame, which had been in

abeyance for the last two hundred years ; and do many other things to glorify and elevate the family to its pristine position ; and no Musgrave doubted that this deliverer would come sooner or later, which took the bitterness out of their patience in the meantime and gave them courage to wait.

Another encouraging circumstance in their lot was that they were fully acknowledged as the oldest family in the county. Other and richer persons pushed in before them to its dignities, and they were no doubt very much left out of its gaieties and pleasures ; but no one doubted that they had a right to take the lead, if ever they were rich enough. This, however, did not seem likely, for the moment at least. The family at Penninghame had, what is much to be avoided by families which would be happy, a history, and a very recent one. There were two sons, but neither of them had been seen at the Castle for nearly fifteen years, and with the name of the elder of these there was connected a dark and painful story, not much known to the new generation, but very well remembered by all the middle-aged people in the county. Young Musgrave had been for a year or two the most popular young squire in the north country, but his brightness

had ended in dismal clouds of misfortune and trouble and bloodshedding, with perhaps crime involved, and certainly many of the penalties of crime. He had not been seen in the north country since the crisis which made all the world acquainted with his unfortunate name ; and his younger brother had reappeared but once in their father's house, which was thus left desolate, except for the one daughter, who had been its delight before and was now its only stay. So far as the county knew, young Musgrave still lived, though he was never mentioned, for there had been no signs of mourning in the house, such as must have intimated to the neighbours the fact of John's death—which also of course would have made Randolph the heir. And save that once, not even Randolph had ever come to break the monotony of life in his father's house. Squire Musgrave and his daughter lived there alone now. They had been alone these fifteen years. They had little society, and did not keep up a large establishment. He was old, and she was no longer young enough to care for the gaieties of the rural neighbourhood. Thus they had fallen out of the current of affairs. The family was “much respected,” but comparatively little heard of after the

undesired and undesirable notoriety it had once gained.

Thus abandoned by its sons, and denuded of the strongest elements of life, it may well be supposed that the castle at Penninghame was a melancholy house. What more easy than to conjure up the saddest picture of such a dwelling? The old man, seated in his desolate home, brooding over perhaps the sins of his sons, perhaps his own—some injudicious indulgence, or untimely severity which had driven them from him; while the sister, worn out by the monotony of her solitary life, shut herself out from all society, and spent her life in longing for the absent, and pleading for them—a sad, solitary woman, with no pleasure in her lot, except that of the past. The picture would have been as appropriate as touching, but it would not have been true. Old Mr. Musgrave was not the erring father of romance. He was a well preserved and spare little man, over seventy, with cheeks of streaky red like winter apples, and white hair, which he wore rather long, falling on the velvet collar of his old-fashioned coat. He had been an outdoor man in his day, and had farmed, and shot, and hunted, like others of his kind, so far as his straitened means and

limited stables permitted ; but when years and circumstances had impaired his activity he had been strong enough to retire, of his own free will, while graceful abdication was still in his power. He spent most of his time now in his library, with only a constitutional walk, or easy ramble upon his steady old cob, to vary his life, except when quarter sessions called him forth, or any other duty of the magistracy, to which he still paid the most conscientious attention. The Musgraves were not people whom it was easy to crush, and Fate had a hard bargain in the old squire, who found himself one occupation when deprived of another with a spirit not often existing in old age. He had committed plenty of mistakes in his day, and some which had been followed by tragical consequences, a practical demonstration of evil which fortunately does not attend all the errors of life ; but he did not brood over them in his old library, nor indulge unavailing compunctions, nor consider himself under any doom ; but on the contrary studied his favourite problems in genealogy and heraldry, and county history, and corresponded with *Notes and Queries*, and was in his way very comfortable. He it was who first pointed out that doubtful blazoning of

Marmion's shield, "colour upon colour," which raised so lively a discussion ; and in questions of this kind he was an authority, and thoroughly enjoyed the little tilts and controversies involved, many of which were as warm as their subjects were insignificant. His family was dropping, or rather had dropped, into decay ; his eldest son was virtually lost to his family and to society ; his youngest son alienated and a stranger ; and some of this at least was the father's fault. But neither the decay of the house, nor the reflection that he was at least partially to blame, made any great difference to the squire. There had no doubt been moments, and even hours, when he had felt it bitterly ; but these moments, though perhaps they count for more than years in a man's life, do not certainly last so long, and age has a way of counterfeiting virtue, which is generally very successful, even to its personal consciousness. Mr. Musgrave was generally respected, and he felt himself to be entirely respectable. He sat in his library and worked away among his county histories, without either compunction or regret—who could throw a stone at him ? He had been rather unfortunate in his family, that was all that could be said.

And Mary Musgrave, his daughter, was just as little disposed to brood upon the past. She had shed many tears in her day, and suffered many things. Perhaps it was in consequence of the family troubles which had come upon her just at the turning-point in her life that she had never married; for she had been one of the beauties of the district—courted and admired by everybody, and wooed by many: by some who indeed still found her beautiful, and by some who had learned to laugh at the old unhappiness of which she was the cause. Miss Musgrave did not like these last, which was perhaps natural; and even now there would be a tone of satire in her voice when she noted the late marriage of one or another of her old adorers. Women do not like men whose hearts they have broken, to get quite healed, and console themselves; this is perhaps a poor feeling, but it is instinctive, and though it may be stoutly struggled against in some cases, and chidden into silence in many, it still maintains an untolerated yet obstinate life. But neither the failure of the adorations she once inspired nor the family misfortunes had crushed her spirit. She lived a not unhappy life, notwithstanding all that had happened. It was she who did everything that was done

at Penninghame. The reins which her father had dropped almost unawares she had taken up. She managed the estate ; kept the bailiff in order ; did all business that was necessary with the lawyer ; and what was a greater feat still, kept her father unaware of the almost absolute authority which she exercised in his affairs. It had to be done, and she had not hesitated to do it ; and on the whole, she, too, though she had suffered many heartaches in her day, was not unhappy now, but lived a life full of activity and occupation. She was forty, and her hair began to be touched by grey—she who had been one of the fairest flowers of the north country. A woman always has to come down from that eminence somehow ; whether she does it by becoming some one's wife, or by merely falling back into the silence of the past and leaving the place free for others, does not much matter. Perhaps, indeed, it is the old maid who has the best of it. A little romance continues to encircle her in the eyes of most of those who have worshipped her youth. She has not married ; why she has not married—that once admired of all admirers ? Has it been that she, too, sharing the lot which she inflicted on so many, was not loved where she loved ? or was it

perhaps that she had made a mistake—sent away some one, perhaps, who knows, the very man who thought of her thus kindly and regretfully—whom she was afterwards sorry to have sent away? Nobody said this in words, but Mary Musgrave at forty was more tenderly thought of than Lady Stanton, who had been the rival queen of the county. Lady Stanton was stout nowadays; in men's minds, when they met her sailing into a ball-room, prematurely indued with the duties of chaperon to her husband's grown-up daughters, there would arise a half-amused wonder how they could have worshipped at her feet as they once did. “Can this muckle wife be my true love Jean?” they said to themselves. But Miss Musgrave, who was slim as a girl in her unwedded obscurity, and whose eyes some people thought as bright as ever, though her hair was grey, gave rise to no such irreverent thoughts. There were men scattered through the world who had a romantic regard, a profound respect still, for this woman whom they had loved, and who had preserved the distinction of loving no one in return. Nobody had died for love of her, though some had threatened it; but this visionary atmosphere of past adoration supplied a delicate homage,

such as is agreeable even to an old maiden's heart.

And Miss Musgrave's life was spent chiefly in the old hall as her father's was spent in his library. She had been full of gay activity in her youth, a bold and graceful horsewoman, ready for anything that was going ; but, with the same sense of fitness that led the squire to his retirement, she too had retired. She had put aside her riding-habits along with her muslins, and wore nothing but rich neutral-tinted silk gowns. Her only extravagance was a pair of ponies, which she drove into the county town when she had business to do, or to pay an occasional visit to her friends ; but by far the greater part of her life was spent in the old hall, where all her favourites and allies came, and all her poor people from the village, who found her seated like a scriptural potentate in the gate, ready to settle all quarrels and administer impartial justice. The hall was connected with the house by a short passage and two doors, which shut out all interchange of sound. There was nothing above it but the high-pitched roof, the turret chimneys, and the ivy, nor was any interposition of servants necessary to usher in visitors by that ever-open way. This was a thing

which deeply affected the spirits and feelings of Eastwood, the only male functionary in the house—the most irreproachable of butlers. A door which opened straight into the lady's favourite sitting-room was felt by him to be an insult to the family; it was more like a farmhouse than a castle; and as for Miss Musgrave, she was just as bad—too affable, a deal too affable, talking to any one that came to her, the tramps on the road as well as the ladies and gentlemen whose unwilling steeds pranced and curveted on the old slope of causeway. This was a standing grievance to the butler, whose complaint was that the “presteedge” of the family was in hourly jeopardy; and his persistent complaint had thrown a shade of dissatisfaction over the household. This, however, did not move the lady of the house. Eastwood and the rest did not know, though some other people did, that it was the proudest woman in the county whom they accused of being too affable, and who received all the world in the old hall without the assistance of any gentleman usher. There were no windows in the side of the hall which fronted the road, but only this huge oaken door, all studded with bars and elaborate hinges of iron. On the other side there was

a recess, with a large square window and cushioned seats, “restored” by village workmen in a not very perfect way, but still preserving the ample and noble lines of its original design. This windowed recess was higher than the rest of the hall, the walls of which were low, though the roof was lofty. But towards the front the only light was from the doorway, which looked due west, and beheld all the sunsets, flooding the ancient place with afternoon light and glories of evening colour. The slanting light seemed to sweep in like an actual visitor in all its sheen of crimson and purple, when the rest of the house was in the still and hush of the grey evening. This was where Miss Musgrave held her throne.

Thus Penninghame Castle stood at the moment this story begins. The lake gleaming cold towards the north, rippling against the pebbles in the little inlet which held the two boats ; the broken ground and ancient trees of the Chase, lying eastward, getting the early lights of the morning, as did the flower-garden, which lay bright under the old walls. A little genial hum of the kindly north-country women-servants, who had been there for a lifetime, or who were the daughters

and cousins of those who had been there for a lifetime, with Eastwood strutting important among them—the one big cock among this barndoors company—made itself audible now and then, a respectful subdued human accompaniment to the ripple of the lake and the whispering of the wind among the trees : and now and then a cheerful cackle of poultry, the sound of the ponies in the stable, or the squire's respectable cob : the heavy steps of the gardener walking slowly along the gravel paths. But for these tranquil sounds, which made the stillness more still, there was nothing but quiet in and about the old house. There had been a time when much had happened there, when there had been angry dissensions, family convulsions, storms of mutual reproach and reproof, outbursts of tears and crying. But all that was over. Nothing had happened at Penninghame for fifteen years. The old squire in his library and Mary in her favourite old chamber lived as though there were no breaks in life, no anguishes, no convulsions, as quietly as their trees, as steadily as their old walls, as if existence could neither change nor end. Thus they went on from day to day and from year to year, in a routine which occupied and

satisfied, and kept the sense of living in their minds, but in a lull and hush of all adventure, of all commotion, of all excitement. Time passed over them and left no trace, save those touches imperceptible at the moment which sorrow or passion could surpass in effect in one day, yet which tell as surely at the end. This was how things were at Penninghame when this story begins.

CHAPTER II.

MARY.

IT was not one of Mary Musgrave's fancies to furnish her hall like a drawing-room. She had collected round her a few things for use, but she was not rich enough to make her favourite place into a toy, as so many people do, nor had she the opportunity of "picking up" rarities to ornament it, as she might have liked to do had she been in the way of them. The room had been a barn fifty years before. Then it became a family storeroom, was fitted up at one end with closets and cupboards, and held the household linen, and sometimes the winter supply of fruit. It was Mary who had rescued it back again to gentler use; but she had not been able to re-decorate or renew it with such careful pretence at antiquity as is common nowadays. All that she could do for it was to collect her own doings there, and all the implements for her work. The windowed

recess which got the morning sun was her business-room. There stood an old secretaire, chosen not because of its age or suitability, but because it was the only thing she had available, a necessity which often confers as much grace as the happiest choice. Opposite the doorway was an old buffet, rough, yet not uncharacteristic, which had been scrubbed clean by a generous housemaid when Miss Musgrave first took to the hall. And much it had wanted that cleansing; but the soap and the water and the scrubbing-brush had not agreed very well, it must be allowed, with the carved mahogany, which ought to have been oak. Between the open door and this big piece of furniture was a square of old Turkey carpet, very much faded, yet still agreeable to the eye, and a spindle-legged table of Queen Anne's days, with drawers, which held Miss Musgrave's knitting and a book, and sometimes homelier matters, mending which she chose to do herself, calculations which were not meant for the common eye.

She was seated here, on an afternoon of October, warm with the shining of that second summer which comes even in the north. The sunshine came so far into the room that it

caught the edges of the carpet, and made a false show of gold upon the faded wool ; and it was so warm that Miss Musgrave had drawn her chair farther into the room than usual, and sat in the shade to escape the unusual warmth. At this moment she was not doing anything. She was sitting quite silent, the book she had been reading laid open upon her knee, enjoying the sun, as people enjoy it to whom it suddenly reveals itself after date when it is past expectation. In the end of October in the north country, people have ceased to think of warmth out of doors, or any blaze of kindly light from the skies—and the morning had been grey though very mild. The sudden glow had caught Mary as she sat, a little chilly, close to her opened door, thinking of a shawl, and had transfigured the landscape and the heavens and her own sentiments all at once. She was sitting with her hands in her lap, and the open book on her knee, thinking of it, surprised by the sweetness of it, feeling it penetrate into her very heart, though she had drawn her chair back out of the sun. No, not thinking—people do not think of the sunshine ; but it went into her heart, bringing back a confused sweetness of recollection and

of anticipation—or rather of the anticipations which were recollections—which had ceased to exist except in memory. Just so does youth expect some sudden sweetness to invade its life; and sometimes the memory of that expectation, even when unfulfilled, brings a half sad, half sweet amusement to the solitary. It was so with this lady seated alone in her old hall. She was Mary again, the young daughter of the house; and at the same time she was old Miss Musgrave smiling at herself.

But as she did so a footstep sounded on the rough pavement of the ascent. No one could come unheard to her retreat, which was a safeguard. She gave a little shake to her head, and took up the open book, which was no old favourite to be dreamed over, but a modern book; and prepared herself for a visitor with that smoothing of the brow and closing up of mental windows which fits us to meet strange eyes. “It is only I,” said the familiar voice of some one who knew and understood this slight movement: and then she dropped the book again, and let the smile come back into her eyes.

“Only you! then I may look as I please. I need not put on my company garb,” she said, with a smile.

“I should hope not,” said the new-comer, reaching the door with that slight quickening of the breath which showed that even the half-dozen steps of ascent was a slight tax upon him. He did not even shake hands with her—probably they had met before that day—but took off his hat as he crossed the threshold, as if he had been going into a church. He was a clergyman, slim and slight, of middle size, or less than middle size, in somewhat rusty grey, with a mildness of aspect which did not promise much strength, bodily or mental. The Vicarage of Penninghame was a poor one, too poor to be worth reserving for a son of the family, and it had been given to the tutor of Mr. Musgrave’s sons twenty years ago. What had happened was natural enough, and might be seen in his eyes still, notwithstanding lapse of time and change of circumstances. Mr. Pennithorne had fallen in love, always hopelessly and mildly, as became his character, with the Squire’s daughter. He had always said it did not matter. He had no more hope of persuading her to love him than of getting the moon to come out of heaven, and circumstances having set marriage before him, he had married, and was happy enough as

happiness goes. And he was the friend, and in a measure the confidant, of this lady whom he had loved in the superlative poetical way—knew all about her, shared her life in a manner, was acquainted with many of her thoughts and her troubles. A different light came into his eyes when he saw her, but he was not at all unhappy. He had a good wife and three nice children, and the kind of life he liked. At fifty, who is there who continues to revel in the unspeakable blisses of youth ? Mr. Pennithorne was very well content: but still when he saw Mary Musgrave—and he saw her daily—there came a different kind of light into his eyes.

“I was in mental *déshabille*,” she said, “and did not care to be caught; though after all it is not everybody who can see when one is not clothed and in one’s right mind.”

“I never knew you out of your right mind, Miss Mary. What was it?—no new trouble?”

“You are always a flatterer, Mr. Pen. You have seen me in all kinds of conditions. No, we don’t have any troubles now. Is that a rash speech? But really I mean it. My father is in very good health and enjoys himself, and I enjoy myself—in reason.”

“ You enjoy yourself ! Yes, in the way of being good to other people.”

“ Hush ! ” she said, putting up her hand to stop him in his little speech, sincere as it was. “ Shall I tell you what it was that put me out of order for any one’s eyes but an old friend’s ? Nothing more than this sunshine, Mr. Pen. Don’t you recollect when we were young how a sudden thought of something that was coming would seize upon you, and flood you with delight— as the sun did just now ? ”

“ I recollect,” he said, fixing his mild eyes upon her, and shaking his head, with a sigh : “ but it never came.”

“ That may be true enough ; but the thought came, and ‘ life is but thought,’ you know ; the thing might not follow. However, we are all quite happy all the same.”

He looked at her, still shaking his head.

“ I suppose so,” he said ; “ I suppose so ; quite happy ! but not as we meant to be ; that was what you were thinking.”

“ I did not go so far. I was not thinking at all. I *think* that I think very seldom. It only caught me as the old thought used to do, and brought so many things back.”

She smiled, but he sighed.

“ Yes, everything is very different. Your-

self—to see you here, offering up your life for others—making a sacrifice——”

“I have made no sacrifice,” she said, somewhat proudly, then laughed. “Is that because I am unmarried, Mr. Pen? You wedded people, you are so sure of being better off than we are. You are too complacent. But *I* am not so sure of that.”

He did not join in her laugh, but looked at her with melting eyes—eyes in which there was some suspicion of tears. It was perhaps a trifle unkind of her to call him complacent in his conjugality. There were a hundred unspeakable things in his look—pity, reverence, devotion, not the old love perhaps, but something higher; something that was never to end.

“On the whole, we are taking it too seriously,” she said, after a pause. “It is over now, and the sun is going down. And you came to talk to me?—perhaps of something in the parish that wants looking to?”

“No—I came in only to look at you, and make sure that you were well. The children you were visiting the other day have the scarlet fever; and besides, I have had a feeling in my mind about you—a presentiment. I should not have been surprised to

hear that there had been—letters—or some kind of advances made——”

“From whom?”

“Well,” he said, after a slight pause; “they are both brothers—both sons—but they are not the same to me, Miss Mary. From John; he has been so much in my mind these two or three days, I have got to dreaming about him. Yes, yes, I know that is not worth thinking of; but we were always in such sympathy, he and I. Don’t you believe in some communication between minds that were closely allied? I do. It is a superstition if you like. Nothing could happen to any of you but, if I were at ever so great a distance, I should know.”

“Don’t be too sure of that, Mr. Pen. Sometimes the dearest to us perish, and we know nothing of it; but I prefer your view. You dreamt of poor John? What did you see? Alas! dreams are the only ways of divining anything about him now!”

“And your father is as determined as ever?”

“We never speak on the subject. It has disappeared like so many other things. Why continue a fruitless discussion which only embittered him and wore me out? If any

critical moment should come, if—one must say it plainly—my father should be like to die—then I should speak, you need not fear."

"I never feared that you would do everything the best sister, the bravest friend, could do."

"Do not praise me too much. I tell you I am doing nothing, and have done nothing for years; and sometimes it strikes me with terror. If anything should happen suddenly! My father is an old man; but talking to him now is of no use; we must risk it. What did you see in your dream?"

"Oh, you will laugh at me," he said with a nervous flutter; "nothing--except that he was here. I dreamt of him before, that time that he came home—after—"

"Don't speak of it," said Miss Musgrave, with a corresponding shiver. "To think that such things should happen, and be forgotten, and we should all go on so comfortably—quite comfortably! I have nothing particular to make me happy, and yet I am as happy as most people—notwithstanding all that I have come through, as the poor women say."

"That is because you are so unselfish—so—"

"Insensible—more like. I am the same as

other people. What the poor folk in the village come through, Mr. Pen!—loss of husbands, loss of children, one after another, grinding poverty, and want, and anxiety, and separation from all they care for. Is it insensibility? I never can tell; and especially now when I share it myself. I am as happy sometimes as when I was young. That sunshine gave me a ridiculous pleasure. What right have I to feel my heart light?—but I did somehow—and I do often—notwithstanding all that has happened, and all that I have ‘gone through.’”

Mr. Pennithorne gave a vague smile, but he made no reply; for either she was accusing herself unjustly, or this was a mood of mind which perhaps derogated a little from Mary Musgrave’s perfection. He had a way himself of keeping on steadfastly on the one string of his anxiety, whatever it might be, and worrying everybody with it—and here he lost the object of his faithful worship. It might—nay, must—be right since so she felt; but he lost her here.

“And speaking of happiness,” she went on after a pause, “I want the children to come with me to Pennington to see the archery. It is pretty, and they will like it. And they like

to drive behind my ponies. They are quite well?—and Emily?"

"Very well. Our cow has been ill, and she has been worrying about it—not much to worry about you will say, you who have so much more serious anxieties."

"Not at all. If I had a delicate child and wanted the milk, I should fret very much. Will you send up for some of ours? As usually happens, we, who don't consume very much, have plenty."

"Thank you," he said, "but you must not think that little Emmy is so delicate. She has not much colour—neither has her mother, you know." He was a very anxious father, and looked up with an eager wistfulness into her face. Little Emmy was so delicate that it hurt him like a foreboding to hear her called so. He could not bear Miss Musgrave, whose word had authority, to give utterance to such a thought.

"I spoke hastily," she said; "I did not think of Emmy. She is ever so much stronger this year. As for paleness, I don't mind paleness in the least. She has such a very fair complexion, and she is twice as strong as last year."

"I am so glad you think so," he said, with

the colour rising to his face. “That is true comfort—for eyes at a little distance are so much better than one’s own.”

“Yes, she is a great deal stronger,” said Miss Musgrave, “but you must send down for the milk. I was pale too, don’t you remember, when you came first? When I was fifteen.”

“I remember—everything,” he said; “even to the dress you wore. I bought my little Mary something like it when I was last in town. It was blue—how well I remember! But Mary will never be like you, though she is your godchild.”

“She is a great deal better; she is like her mother,” said Miss Musgrave promptly; “and Johnny is like his father, the best possible distribution. You are happy with your children, Mr. Pen. I envy people their children, it is the only thing; though perhaps they would bore me if I had them always on my hands. You think not? Yes, I am almost sure they would bore me. We get a kind of fierce independence living alone. To be hampered by a little thing always wanting something—wanting attention and care—I don’t think I should like it. But Emily was born for such cares. How well she looks with her

baby in her arms—always the old picture over again—the Madonna and the child.”

“Poor Emily,” he said, though why he could not have told, for Emily did not think herself poor. Mr. Pennithorne always felt a vague pity for his wife when he was with Miss Musgrave, as for a poor woman who had many excellent qualities, but was here thrown into the shade. He could not say any more. He got up to go away, consoled and made comfortable he could not quite tell why. She was always sweet he said to himself as he went home. What she had said about being bored by children was a mere delusion, or perhaps a little conscious effort of self-deception, persuading herself that to have no children and to be independent was the best. What a wife she would have made! What a mother! he said this to himself quite impartially, knowing well that she never could have been wife for him and feeling a pang at his heart for the happiness she had lost. Married life was not unmixed happiness always; it had its difficulties, he knew. But if *she* had married it was not possible that she could have been otherwise than happy. With her there could have been no drawbacks. Mr. Pennithorne looked upon the question from a husband’s point of view alone.

When he was gone, Miss Musgrave sat still without changing her place, at first with a smile, which gradually faded away from her face, like the last suffusion of the sunshine, which was going too. She smiled at her fast friend, to whom she knew, notwithstanding his legitimate affection for his Emily, she herself stood first of created beings. It was a folly, but it did not hurt him, she reflected with a faint amusement; and Emily and the children, notwithstanding this sentiment, were first and foremost really in his heart. Poor Mr. Pen! he had always been like this, mildly sentimental, offering up an uninterrupted gentle incense. But he was not in the least unhappy, though perhaps he liked by times to think that he was. Few people were really unhappy. By moments life was hard; but the struggle itself made a kind of happiness, a strain of living which it was good to feel by times. This was her theory. Most people when they come to forty have some theory or another, some settled way of getting through their existence, and adapting themselves for it. Hers was this: that evil was very much less than good in every way, and that people suffered a great deal less than they gave themselves credit for. Life had its

compensations, daily and hourly, she thought. Her own existence had no exciting source of joy in it, but how far it was from being unhappy! Had she been unhappy she would have scoffed at herself. What! so many things to enjoy, so many good and pleasant circumstances around, and not happy! Would not that have been a disgrace to any woman? So she was apt to think Mr. Pennithorne extracted a certain cunning enjoyment from that vain love for herself which had been so visionary at all times, and which he persuaded himself had saddened his life. She thought it had been a harmless delusion; a secret advantage rather; something to fall back upon; a soft and visionary grievance of which he never wearied. And perhaps she was right. She sat looking after him with a smile on her face.

The sun had crept away from her open doorway as they had talked. It was stealing further and further off, withdrawing from the line of the road, from the village roofs, from the gleam of the lake—and like the sun her smile stole away, from her eyes first, and then from the lingering curves about her mouth. Why was it that he could think he felt some action upon him of John's mind in the far

distance, while she felt none ? No kind of presentiment or premonition had come to her. It must be foolishness she was sure—superstition ; for if sympathy could thus communicate even a vague thrill of warning from one to another through the atmosphere of the mind, surely she was a more likely object to receive it than Mr. Pennithorne ! John knew her, —could not doubt her, surely. Therefore to her, if to any one, this secret communication must have come. The smile disappeared altogether from her mouth as she entered upon this subject, and her whole face and eyes became grave and grey, like the dull coldness of the east, half-resentful of the sunset which still went on upon the other edge of the horizon, dispersing all those vain reflections to every quarter except that from which the sun rose. Could it be possible after all that John might trust Mr. Pennithorne with a more perfect confidence, as one unconnected and unconcerned with all that had passed, than he could give to herself ? The thought, even though founded on such visionary grounds, hurt her a little ; yet there was a kind of reason in it. He might think that she, always at her father's side, and able to influence him in so many ways, might have done more for her

brother ; whereas with Mr. Pennithorne, who could do nothing, the sentiment of trust would be unbroken. She sat thus idly making it out to herself, making wondering casts of thought after her brother in the darkness of the unknown, as inch by inch the light stole out of the sky. It was not a fine sunset that night. The sun was yellow and mournful ; long lines of cloud broke darkly upon his sinking, catching only sick reflections of the pale light beneath. At last he was all gone, except one streaming yellow sheaf of rays that seemed to strike against and barb themselves into the damp green outline of the hill.

Her eyes were upon this, watching that final display, which, somehow in the absorption of her thoughts, kept her from observing an object near at hand, an old hackney-coach from Pennington town—where there was a railway station—which came along the road, a black, slow, lumbering vehicle, making a dull roll of sound which might have been a country cart. It came nearer and nearer while Miss Musgrave watched the bundle of gold arrows flash into the hill-side and disappear. Her eyes were dazzled by them, and chilled by their sudden disappearance, which left all the landscape cold and wrapped in a greyness of sudden

evening. Mary came to herself with a slight shiver and shock. And at that moment the dull roll of the cab ceased, and the thing stood revealed to her. She rose to her feet with a thrill of wonder and expectation. The hackney carriage had drawn up at the foot of the slope, opposite to and beneath her. What was coming? Had Mr. Pennithorne been warned after all, while she had been left in darkness? Her heart seemed to leap into her throat, while she stood clasping her hands together to get some strength from them, and waiting for the revelation of this new thing, whatever it might be.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW-COMERS.

THE cab was loaded with two boxes on the roof, foreign trunks, of a different shape from those used at home ; and a woman's face, in a fantastic foreign head-dress, peered through the window. Who could this be ? Mary stood as if spell-bound, unable to make a movement. The driver, who was an ordinary cab-driver from Pennington, whose homely everydayness of appearance intensified the strangeness of the others, opened the door of the carriage, and lifted out, first a small boy, with a scared face and a finger in his mouth, who stared at the strange place, and the figures in the doorway, with a fixed gaze of panic, on the eve of tears. Then out came with a bound, as if pushed from behind as well as helped a little roughly by the cabman, the foreign woman, at whose dress the child clutched with a frightened cry. Then there was a pause, during which

some one inside threw out a succession of wraps, small bags, and parcels ; and then there stepped forth, with a great shawl on one arm, and a basket almost as large as herself on the other, clearly the leading spirit of the party, a little girl who appeared to be about ten years old. " You will wait a moment, man, till we get the pay for you," said this little personage in a high-pitched voice, with a distinctness of enunciation which made it apparent that the language, though spoken with very little accent, was unfamiliar to her. Then she turned to the woman and said a few words much more rapidly, with as much aid of gesture as was compatible with the burdens. Mary felt herself look on at all this like a woman in a dream. What was it all—a dream or reality ? She felt incapable of movement, or rather too much interested in the curious scene which was going on before her, to think of movement or interference of any kind. When she had given her directions, whatever they were, the little girl turned round and faced the open door and the lady who had not moved. She gave these new circumstances a long, steady, investigating look. They were within a dozen yards of each other, but the chatelaine stood still and said nothing, while the little invader

inspected her, and prepared her assault. The child, who looked the impersonation of life and purpose between her helpless companion and the wondering stranger whom she confronted, was dark and pale, not like the fair English children to whom Mary Musgrave was accustomed. Her dark eyes seemed out of proportion to her small, colourless face, and gave it an eager look of precocious intelligence. Her features were small, her dark hair falling about her in half-curling masses, her head covered with a little velvet cap trimmed with fur, as unlike anything children wore in England at the time as the anxious meaning of her face was different from ordinary baby prettiness. She made a momentary pause—then put down the basket on the stones, threw the shawl on the top of it, and mounted the breach with resolute courage. The stones were rough to the little child's feet; there was a dilation in her eyes that looked like coming tears, and as she faced the alarming stranger, who stood there looking at her, a burning red flush came momentarily over her face. But she neither sat down and cried as she would have liked to do, nor ran back again to cling to the nurse's skirts like her little brother. The small thing had a duty to do, and did it with a courage

which might have put heroes to shame. Resolutely she toiled her way up to Miss Musgrave at the open door.

“Are you—Mary?” she said; the little voice was strange yet sweet, with its distinct pronunciation and unfamiliar accent. “Are you—Mary?” Her big eyes seemed to search the lady all over, making a rapid comparison with some description she had received. There was doubt in her tone when she repeated the name a second time, and the tears visibly came nearer, and got with a shake and tremor into her voice.

“What do you want with Mary?” said Miss Musgrave; “who are you, little girl?”

“I do not think you can be Mary,” said the child. “He said your hair was like Nello’s, but it is more like his own. And he said you were beautiful—so you are beautiful, but old—and he never said you were old. Oh, if you are not Mary, what shall we do? what shall we do?”

She clasped her little hands together, and for a moment trembled on the edge of a childish outburst, but stopped herself with a sudden curb of unmistakable will. “I must think what is to be done,” she cried out

sharply, putting her little hands upon her trembling mouth.

“Who are you? who are you?” cried Mary Musgrave, trembling in her turn; “child, who was it that sent you to me?”

The little thing kept her eyes fixed upon her, with that watchfulness which is the only defence of weakness, ready to fly like a little wild creature at any approach of danger. She opened a little bag which hung by her side and took a letter from it, never taking her great eyes all the time from Miss Musgrave’s face. “This was for you, if you were Mary,” she said; holding the letter jealously in both hands. “But he said when I spoke to you, if it was you, you would know.”

“You strange little girl!” cried Miss Musgrave, stepping out upon the stones and holding out her hands eagerly; but the child made a little move backward at the moment, in desperation of fear, yet courage.

“I will not give it you! I will not give it! it is everything we have—unless you are Mary,” she cried, with the burst of a suppressed sob.

“Who are you then, child? Yes, I am Mary, Mary Musgrave—give me the letter. Is not this the house you were told of? Give me

the letter—the letter ! ” said Miss Musgrave, once more holding out her hands.

And once more the child made her jealous mental comparison between what the lady was, and what she had been told to look for. “ I cannot do what I please,” she said, with little quivering lips. “ I have Nello to take care of. He is only such a little, little child. Yes, it is the house he told me of ; but he said if you were Mary— Ah ! he said you would know us and take us into your arms, and be so kind, so kind ! ”

“ Little girl,” said Miss Musgrave, the tears dropping from her cheeks. “ There is only one man’s child that you can be. You are John’s little girl, my brother John, and I am his sister Mary. But I do not know your name, nor anything about you. Give me John’s letter—and come to me, come to me, my child ! ”

“ I am Liliás,” said the little girl ; but she held back, still examining with curious though less terrified eyes. “ You will give it me back if you are not Mary ? ” she went on, at length holding out the letter ; but she took no notice of the invitation to come nearer, which Mary herself forgot in the eagerness of her anxiety to get the letter, the first communication from

her brother—if it was from her brother—for so many years. She took it quickly, almost snatching it from the child's reluctant fingers, and leaning against the doorway in her agitation, tore it hastily open. Little Lilias was agitated too, with fear and desolate strangeness, and that terrible ignorance of any alternative between safety and utter destruction which makes danger insupportable to a child. What were they to do if their claims were not acknowledged? Wander into the woods and die in the darkness like the children in the story? Little Lilias had feared nothing till that first doubt had come over her at the door of the house, where, her father had instructed her, she was to be made so happy. But if they were not taken in and made happy, what were she and Nello to do? A terror of darkness, and cold, and starvation came upon the little girl. She would wrap the big shawl about her little brother, but what if wild beasts or robbers should come in the middle of the dark? Her little bosom swelled full, the sobs rose into her throat. Oh where could she go with Nello, if this was not Mary? But she restrained the sobs by a last effort, like a little hero. She sat down on the stone edge of the causeway, and held her hands clasped tight to keep her-

self together, and fixed her eyes upon the lady with the letter. The lady and the letter swam and changed, through the big tears that kept coming, but she never took those great dark, intense eyes from Miss Musgrave's face. The Italian nurse was bending over Nello, fully occupied in hushing his little plaints. Nello was tired, hungry, sleepy, cold. He had no responsibility upon him, poor little mite, to overcome the weakness of nature. He looked no more than six, though he was older, a small and delicate child ; and he clung to his nurse, holding her desperately, afraid of he knew not what. She had plenty to do to take care of him without thinking of what was going on above; though the woman was indignant to be kept waiting, and cast fierce looks, in the intervals of petting Nello, upon the lady, the cold Englishwoman who was so long of taking the children to their arms. As for the cabman, emblem of the general unconcern which surrounds every individual drama, he stood leaning calmly upon his horse, waiting for the *dénouement*, whatever it might be. Miss Musgrave would see him paid one way or another, and this was the only thing for which he needed to care.

“Lilias,” said Miss Musgrave, going hastily

to the child, with tears running down her cheeks, "I am your aunt Mary, my darling, and you will soon learn to know me. Come and give me a kiss, and bring me your little brother. You are tired with your long journey, my poor child."

"No, no—I am not tired—only Nello ; and he is h-hungry. Ah ! Kiss Nello, Nello—come and kiss him ; he is the baby. And are you Mary—real, real Mary ?" cried the little girl, bursting out into sobs ; "ch, I cannot h-help it. I did not mean it ; I was fr-frightened. Nello, come, come, Mary is here."

"Yes, Mary is here," said Miss Musgrave, taking the child into her arms, who, even while she sobbed against her shoulder, put out an impatient little hand and beckoned, crying, "Nello ! Nello !" But it was not so easy to extract Nello from his nurse's arms. He cried and clung all the faster from hearing his sister's outburst ; their poor little hearts were full ; and what chokings of vague misery, the fatigue and discomfort infinitely deepened by a dumb consciousness of loneliness, danger, and strangeness behind, were in these little inarticulate souls ! something more desperate in its inability to understand what it feared,

its dim anguish of uncomprehension, than anything that can be realized and fathomed. Mary signed eagerly to the nurse to bring the little boy indoors into the hall, which was not a reassuring place, vast and dark as it was, in the dimness of the evening, to a child. But she had too many difficulties on her hands in this strange crisis to think of that. She had the boxes brought in also, and hastily sent the carriage away, with a desperate sense as of burning her ships, and leaving no possible way to herself of escape from the difficulty. The gardener, who had appeared round the corner, attracted by the sound, presented himself as much out of curiosity as of goodwill to assist in carrying in the boxes, "though it would be handiest to drive round to the front door, and tak' them straight oop t'stair," he said, innocently enough. But when Miss Musgrave gave authoritative directions that they were to be brought into the hall, naturally the gardener was surprised. This was a proceeding entirely unheard of, and not to be understood in any way.

"It'll be a deal more trouble after," he said, under his breath, which did not matter much. But when he had obeyed his mistress's orders, he went round to the kitchen full of the new

event. "There's something oop," the gardener said, delighted to bring so much excitement with him, and he gave a full account of the two pale little children, the foreign woman with skewers stuck in her hair, and finally, most wonderful of all, the boxes which he had deposited with his own hands on the floor of the hall. "I ken nothing about it," he said, "but them as has been longer aboot t' house than me could tell a deal if they pleased ; and Miss Brown, it's her as is wanted," he added leisurely at the end.

Miss Brown, who was Mary Musgrave's maid, and had been standing listening to his story with frequent contradictions and denials, in a state of general protestation, started at these words.

"You great gaby," she said, "why didn't you say so at first ?" and hurried out of the kitchen, not indisposed to get at the bottom of the matter. She had been Miss Musgrave's favourite attendant for twenty years, and in that time had, as may be supposed, known about many things which her superiors believed locked in the depths of their own bosoms. She could have written the private history of the family with less inaccuracy than belongs to most records of secret history. And she was

naturally indignant that Tom Gardener, a poor talkative creature, who could keep nothing to himself, should have known this new and startling event sooner than she did. She hurried through the long passage from the kitchen, casting a stealthy glance in passing at the closed door of the library, where the Squire sat unconscious. A subdued delight was in the mind of the old servant; certainly it is best when there are no mysteries in a family, when all goes well—but it is not so amusing. A great event of which it was evident the squire was in ignorance, which probably would have to be kept from him, and as much as possible from the household—well, it might be unfortunate that such things should be, but it was exciting, it woke people up.

Miss Brown obeyed this summons with more genuine alacrity than she had felt for years.

Very different were the feelings of her mistress standing there in the dimness of the old hall, her frame thrilling and her heart aching with the appeal which her brother had made to her, out of a silence which for more than a dozen years had been unbroken as that of the grave. She could scarcely believe yet that she had seen his very handwriting and read words which came straight from him and

were signed by his now unfamiliar name. The children, who crouched together frightened by the darkness, were as phantoms to her, like a dream about which she had just got into the stage of doubt. Till now it had been all real to her, as dreams appear at first. But now she stood, closing the door in the stillness of the evening, which, still as it was, was full of curiosity and questioning and prying eyes, and asked herself if these little figures were real, or inventions of her fancy. Real children of her living brother—was it true, was it possible? They were awestricken by the gathering dusk, by the strange half-empty room, by the dim circle of the unknown which surrounded them on every side. The nurse had put herself upon a chair on the edge of the carpet, where she sat holding the little boy on her knee, while little Lilias, who had backed slowly towards this one familiar figure, stood leaning against her, clutching her also with one hand, though she concealed instinctively this sign of fear. The boy withdrew the wondering whiteness of his face from the nurse's shoulder now and then to give a frightened, fascinated look round, then buried it again in a dumb trance of dismay and terror, too frightened to cry. What was to

be done with these frightened children and the strange woman to whom they clung? Mary could not keep them here to send them wild with alarm. They wanted soft beds, warm fires, cheerful lights, food and comfort, and they had come to seek it in the only house in the world which was closed by a curse and a vow against them. Mary Musgrave was not the kind of woman who is easily frightened by vows or curses; there was none of the romantic folly in her which could believe in the reality of an unjust or uncalled-for malediction. But she was persuaded of the reality of a thing which involved no supernatural mysteries, the obstinacy of her father's mind, and his determination to hold by the verdict he had given. Years move and change everything, even the hills and the seas—but not the narrow mind of an obstinate and selfish man. She did not call him by these names; he was her father and she did not judge him; but no more did she hope in him. And in this wonderful moment a whole circle of possibilities ran through her mind. She might take them to the village; but there were other dangers there; or to the Parsonage, but Mr. Pen was weak and poor Emily a gossip. Could she dare the danger that was

nearest, and take them somehow upstairs out of the way, and conceal them there, defying her father ? In whatever way it was settled she would not desert them—but what was she to do ? Miss Brown coming upon her suddenly in the dusk frightened her almost as much as the children were frightened. The want of light and the strangeness of the crisis combined made every new figure like a ghost.

“ Yes, I sent for you. I am in—difficulty, Martha. These children have just come—the children of a friend——” Her first idea was to conceal the real state of the case even from her confidential and well-informed maid.

“ Dear me,” said Miss Brown, with seeming innocence. “ How strange ! to bring a little lady and gentleman without any warning. But I’ll go and give orders, ma’am ; there are plenty of rooms vacant, there need not be any difficulty——”

Miss Musgrave caught her by the arm.

“ What I want for the moment is light, and some food *here*. Bring me the lamp I always use. No, not Eastwood ; never mind Eastwood. I want you to bring it, they will be less afraid in the light.”

“ There is a fire in the dining-room, ma’am, it is only a step, and Eastwood is lighting the

candles ; and there you can have what you like for them."

It was confidence Miss Brown wanted—nothing but confidence. With that she was ready to do anything ; without it she was Miss Musgrave's respectable maid, to whom all mysteries were more or less improper. She crossed her hands firmly and waited. The room was growing darker and darker every minute, and the foreign nurse began to lose patience. She called "Madame ! madame !" in a high voice ; then poured forth into a stream of words, so rapid and so loud as both mistress and maid thought they had never heard spoken before. Miss Musgrave was not a great linguist. She knew enough to be aware that it was Italian the woman was speaking, but that was all.

"I do not understand you," she said in distress, going up to the little group. But as she approached a sudden accession of terror, instantly suppressed on the part of the little girl but irrepressible by the younger boy, and which broke forth in a disjointed way, arrested her steps. Were they afraid of her, these children ? "Little Lilias," she said piteously, "be a brave child and stand by me. I cannot take you out of this cold room

yet, but lights are coming and you will be taken care of. If I leave you alone for a little while will you promise me to be brave and not to be afraid?"

There was a pause, broken only by little flutterings of that nervous exhaustion which made the children so accessible to fear. Then a small voice said, dauntless, yet with a falter—

"I will stay. I will not be afraid."

"Thank God," said Mary Musgrave, to herself. The child was already a help and assistance. "Martha," she said hastily, "tell no one; they are—my brother's children—"

"Good Lord!" said Martha Brown, frightened out of her primness. "And it's dark, and there's two big boxes, and master don't know."

"That is the worst of all," said Miss Musgrave sadly. She had never spoken to any one of her father's inexorable verdict against John and all belonging to him. "The heir! and I must not take him into the house of his fathers! Take care of them, take care of them while I go— And, Martha, say nothing—not a word."

"Not if they were to cut me in pieces, ma'am!" said Miss Brown fervently. She

was too old a servant to work in the dark ; but confidence restored all her faculties to her. It was not, however, in the nature of things that she should discharge her commission without a betrayal more or less of the emergency. “ I want some milk, please,” she said to the cook, “ for my lady.” It was only in moments of importance that she so spoke of her mistress. And the very sound of her step told a tale.

“ I told ye there was somethink oop,” said Tom Gardener, still lingering in the kitchen.

And to see how the house brightened up, and all the servants grew alert in the flutter of this novelty ! Nothing had happened at the castle for so long—they had a right to a sensation. Cook, who had been there for a long time, recounted her experience to her assistants in low tones of mystery.

“ Ah, if ye’d known the place when the gentlemen was at home,” said cook ; “ the things as happened in t’auld house—such goings on !—coming in late and early—o’er the watter and o’er the land—and the strivings, that was enough to make a body flee out of their skin ! ” She ended with a regretful sigh for the old times. “ That was life, that was ! ” she said.

Meanwhile Mary Musgrave came in out of the dark hall into the lighted warmth of the dining-room, where the glass and the silver shone red in the firelight. How cosy and pleasant it was there! how warm and cheerful! Just the place to comfort the children and make them forget their miseries. The children! How easily her mind had undertaken the charge of them—the fact of their existence; already they had become the chief feature in her life. She paused to look at herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece, to smooth her hair, and put the ribbon straight at her neck. The Squire was “very particular,” and yet she did not remember to have had this anxious desire to be pleasant to his eyes since that day when she had crept to him to implore a reversal of his sentence. She had obtained nothing from him then; would she be more fortunate now? The colour had gone out of her face, but her eyes were brighter and more resolute than usual. How her heart beat when Mr. Musgrave said, “Come in,” calmly from the midst of his studies, as she knocked trembling at the library door!

PART II.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER THE SILENCE OF YEARS.

“COME in,” said the Squire. He was sitting among his books, working with such a genuine sense of importance as was strange to see. Mary did not know that she thought anything in the world (except this present mission of hers) so important as he thought his search into the heraldic fortunes of the family. He was in full cry after a certain “augmentation” which had got into the Musgrave arms no one well knew how. It was only the Musgraves of Penninghame who bore this distinction, and how did they come by it? It appeared in the thirteenth century—in the age of the Crusades. Was it in recollection of some feat of a Crusader?—that was the question. He put down his pen and laid one open book upon

another as she came in. He had no consciousness in his mind to make him critical or inquiring. He did not observe her paleness, nor the special glitter in her eyes. "I am busy," he said, "so you must be brief. I think I have got hold of that 'chief' at last. After years of search it is exciting to find the first trace of it; but perhaps it is best to wait till I have verified my guesses—they are still not much more than guesses. What a satisfaction it will be when all is clear!"

"I am glad you are to have this satisfaction, papa."

"Yes, I know you take little interest in it for itself. Ladies seldom do; though I can't tell why, for heraldry ought to be an interesting science to them and quite within their reach. Nothing has happened about the dinner, I hope? I notice that is your general subject when you come into my room so late. Law business in the morning, dinner in the evening—a very good distribution. But I want a good dinner to-night, my dear, to celebrate my success."

"It is not about dinner. Father, we have been living a very quiet life for many years."

"Thank Heaven!" said the old man. "Yes, a quiet life. A man of my age is

entitled to it, Mary. I never shrank from exertion in my time, nor do I now, as this will testify." He laid his hand with a genial complaisance upon the half-written paper that lay before him. Then he said with a smile, "But make haste, my dear. There is still an hour before dinner, and I am in the spirit of my work. We need not occupy our time, you and I, with general remarks."

"I did not mean it for a general remark," she said with a tremble in her voice. "It is that I have something important—very important to speak of, and I don't know how to begin."

"Important—very important!" he said, with the indulgence of jocular superiority for a child's undue gravity. "I know what these important matters are. Some poaching rascal that you don't know how to manage, or a quarrel in the village? Bring them to me: but bring them to-morrow, Mary, when my mind is at rest—I cannot give my attention now."

"It is neither poaching nor quarrelling," she said. "I can manage the village. There are other things. Father, though we have been quiet for so many years, it is not because there has been nothing to think of—no seeds of trouble in the past—no anxieties—"

“I don’t know what you are thinking of,” he said, pettishly. “No anxieties? A man has them as long as he is in the world. We are mortal. Seeds of trouble? I have told you, Mary, that you may spare me general remarks.”

“Oh, nothing was further from my mind than general remarks,” she cried. “I don’t know how to speak. Father—look here—read it; it will tell its own story best. This is what, after the silence of years, I have received to-day.”

“The silence of years!” said the Squire. He had to fumble for his spectacles, which he had taken off, though he carefully restrained himself from betraying any special interest. A red colour had mounted to his face. Perhaps his mind did not go so far as to divine what it was; but still a sudden glimmering, like the tremble of pale light before the dawn, had come into his mind.

And this was the thunderbolt that suddenly fell upon him in his quietness after the silence of years:—

“MY DEAR SISTER MARY,—This will be given to you by my little daughter Lilias. The sight of my handwriting and of the

children will be enough to startle you, so that I need not try to soften the shock which you must have already received. I claim from my father shelter for my children. Their mother is dead ; so are the others of my family whose very names will never be known to my nearest relations. Never mind that now. I am a man both sick and sorry, worn by the world, lonely, and not much better than an adventurer. These children are the last of our race, and the boy, however reluctant you may be, is my father's heir. I claim for them the shelter of the family roof. I have no home to give them, nor can I give them the care they require. Mary, you are a good woman : you are blameless one way or another. I charge you with my children. God do so to you and more also, according as you deal with them. Some time or other before I die I will drag myself home. That you may be sure of, unless God cuts short my life by the way, of which, if He will, I shall not complain.

“ Your brother,

“ JOHN MUSGRAVE.”

This was the letter which the Squire placed upon his mouldy books, over the statement he had been writing. He did not speak, but read

it steadily to the end, betraying no emotion except by the glow of colour that rose over his weather-beaten face. Who that has sat by, anxious, watching the effect of such a letter, needs to be told with what intense observation Mary Musgrave noted every sign of the rigid control he kept upon himself—the tight clutch of one hand upon the table, the tremor of the other which held the letter? But the Squire said nothing, not even when he had visibly come to the end. He held it before him still for some minutes; then he began to fold it elaborately—but said nothing still. The shadow of his head with its falling locks of white hair shook a little upon the wall. There is a peculiar tremble which shows the very severity of restraint, and this was of that kind.

“Father! have you nothing to say?”

“I thought it was a subject put aside, not to be mentioned between us,” he said. “I may be wrong—if I am wrong you can inform me; but I supposed this and all cognate subjects to be closed between us——”

“How can this be closed? I have ceased to importune you, but this is a new opening. And there is more than the letter—the children——”

“ Ah ! ” He gave a slight cry. If he could it would have been an exclamation of scorn, but this was too much for him ; the cry was sharp with impatient pain.

“ I could not keep *them* a secret from you, father.”

“ I hate secrets,” he said ; “ nevertheless there are few families in which they are not necessary. When he had said this he pushed the letter towards her, drew forward his heraldry books, and took his pen in his hand.

“ Will you say nothing to me ? ” she cried. “ Will you give me no answer ? What am I to do ? ”

“ Do ! It seems to me quite an unnecessary question. It is a long time since I have given up exercising any control over you, Mary,” he said.

“ But, father, have a little pity. The house is not mine to do as I like with.”

“ That is unfortunate,” he said, with a cold precision which made it doubtful whether he spoke satirically or in earnest. “ But it is not my fault. You cannot expect me to make place voluntarily for another ; and even if I did, as you are a woman, it would be of very little use to you. You cannot be the heir——”

“And this boy is !” she said, with a gesture of appeal.

Mr. Musgrave said nothing. He shook his head impatiently, pushed the letter to her with an energy that flung it into her lap, and resumed his writing. She stood by while he deliberately returned to his description of the “chief,” turning up a page in his heraldry book, where all the uses and meanings of that “augmentation” were discussed. According to all appearance his mind took up this important question exactly where he had left it ; and he resumed his writing steadily, betraying agitation only by a larger, bolder, and firmer handwriting than usual. His daughter stood for a moment by his side, and watched him speechless—then went out of the room without another word. The Squire went on writing for a full minute more. The lines he wrote had not been so bold, so firm, so well-defined for years. Was it because he had to put forth the whole force that remained in him, soul and body, to get them upon the paper at all ? When all sound of her departing steps had died out, he stopped suddenly, and, putting down his pen, let his head drop upon the open book and its figured page. An augmentation of honour ! The days were over in which such

gifts came from heralds and kings. And instead, here were struggles of a very different kind from those which won new blazons. But the most insensible, the most self-controlled of men, could not take such an interruption of his studies with absolute calm. He had never been in such desperate conflict with any man as with this son, and here his enemy, whom nature forbade to be his enemy, his antagonist, had come again after the silence of years and confronted him. To see such a one pass by could not but excite a certain emotion ; but to meet him thus as it were face to face ! The passion of parental love has been often portrayed. There is no passion more fervent, none perhaps even that can equal it ; but there is another passion scarcely less intense—that which rises involuntarily in the bosom of a man between whom and his son there are no ties of mutual dependence, when the younger has become as the elder, knowing good and evil, and all the experiences of life ; when there is no longer any question of authority and obedience, and natural affection yields to a strain of feeling which is too strong for it. Many long years had passed now since young Musgrave ceased to be his father's pride and boyish second in everything. He had grown

a man, his equal, and had resisted and held his own in the conflict half a lifetime ago. All the embitterment which close relationship gives to a deadly quarrel had been between them, and though the father had so far got the better as to drive the rebel out of his sight, he had not crushed his will or removed him from his standing-ground. He was the victor, though the vanquished. His son had not yielded, nor would ever yield. When Mr. Musgrave raised his head his face was pale, and his head shook with a nervous tremor ; all the broken redness of his cheeks shone like pencilled lines through his pallor, increasing it. "This will never do," he said to himself, and rising, went to an old oak cupboard in the corner, and poured himself a small glass of the strongest of liqueurs. Not for all that remained of the Musgrave property would he have shown himself so broken, so overcome. This other man who was no younger, but only stronger than himself, was at the same time his successor, ready to push him out of his seat ; waiting for a triumph that must come sooner or later. He had been able to forget all about him for years ; to thrust out the thought of him when it recurred ; but here the man stood once more confronting him. The Squire was

wise in his way, and knew that there was nothing in the world so bad for the health, or so likely to give his antagonist an advantage, as the indulgence of emotion—therefore he crushed it “upon the threshold of the mind.” He would not give him so much help towards the inevitable eventual triumph. He went back to his writing-table when he had fortified himself with that potent mouthful ; but, knowing himself, tried his pen upon a stray bit of paper before he would resume his writing. What he wrote was in the quivering lines of old age. He tore it into pieces. No one should see such a sign of agitation in the manuscript which was to last longer than he. He took up the most learned of his books, and began to read with close attention. Here, at all events, the adversary should not get the better of him ; or, at least, if thoughts did surge and rise, obliterating the old escutcheon altogether and the lion on its “chief,” nobody should be the wiser.

Thus the old man sat, with a desperate courage worthy a better object, and mastered the furious excitement in his mind. But he was not thinking of the children as perhaps the reader of this story may suppose. He was not resisting the thrill of natural interest, the

softening of heart which might have attended that sudden arrival. He did not even realize the existence of the children. His thoughts were of conflicts past, and of the opponent against whom he had striven so often : the opponent whom he could not altogether dismiss or get rid of, his rival, his heir, his successor, his son. There was nothing he had wished as a father, as a Musgrave, as the head of a great county family, which this man had not done his best to undo ; and as he had by ill-fortune thirty years the advantage of his father, there was no doubt that he would, some time or other, undo and destroy to an extent of which he was incapable now ; unless indeed he was prevented in the most disgraceful way, incapacitated by public conviction of crime—conviction, which was only too probable, which hung over his banished head and prevented his return home. What would there be but pain in the thought of such a son—an opponent if he were innocent, if he were guilty a disgrace to the family name ? The more completely the Squire could banish this thought from his mind, the happier he was ; and he had banished it with wonderful success for many years past. He had done all he could to evade the idea that he himself would one day be compelled to

die. Many men do this who have no painful consciousness of the heir behind who is waiting to dispossess them ; and Mr. Musgrave had, to a great degree, attained tranquillity on this point. The habit of living seems to grow stronger with men as they draw near the end of their lives. It has lasted so long ; it has been so steady and uninterrupted, why should it ever cease ? But here was the death's-head rising at the feast ; the executioner giving note of his presence behind backs. John ! he had dismissed him from his mind. He had exercised even a kind of Christianity in forgetting him. But here he was again, incapable of being forgotten. What a tremor in his blood—what undue working of all that machinery of the heart which it was so essential to keep in calm good order had this interruption caused ! he who had no vital energy to spare ; who wanted it all for daily comfort and that continuance which with younger people is so lightly taken for granted. How much of that precious reserve had been consumed by this shock ! It had been done on purpose, perhaps, to try what the effect of such a shock upon his nerves and fibres would be.

Mr. Musgrave pushed back his chair again from the table, and gave all his faculties to the

task of calming himself down. He would not allow himself to be overcome by John. But it took him a long time to accomplish this, to get his pulse back to its usual rate of beating. When he relaxed for a moment in his watch over himself, old recollections would come back, scenes of the long warfare, words that were as swords and smote him over again with burning and stinging wounds. He had to calm it all down and still memory altogether if he would recover his ordinary composure. It wanted about an hour of dinner when he began this process. Up to that time it did not so much matter, except for wearing him out and diminishing his strength. But it was his determination that no one should know or see this agitation which he had not been able to master. His daughter thought she had a harder task before her when she left him and hurried back to the ghostly half-lighted hall where she had left the children ; but what was her work, or the commotion of her thoughts, in comparison to that which raged within the bosom of the old man in his solitude, defying Heaven and nature, and all gentler influences—whose conflict was for himself only, as it was carried on unhelped and unthought of by himself alone ?

CHAPTER V.

WAKING UP.

MISS MUSGRAVE went back to her visitors with a heightened colour and assured step. Her alarm had departed along with her wistful and hopeful ignorance as to what her father might do. Now that she knew, her courage came back to her. When she opened the door which led out of the little passage into the hall, the scene before her was striking and strange enough to arrest her like a picture. The great ancient room, with its high raftered roof and wide space, lay in darkness—all but one bright spot in the midst where the lamp stood on the table. Miss Brown had hastily arranged a kind of homely meal, a basket of oatcakes, some white bread in a napkin, biscuits, home-made gingerbread, and a jug of fresh milk. The white and brown bread, the tall white jug, the cloth upon the tray, all helped to increase the whiteness of that spot in the

gloom. In the midst of this light sat the Italian nurse, dark and vigorous, with the silver pins in her black hair, and red ribbons at her breast. The pale little boy sat on her knee ; he had a little fair head like an angel in a picture, light curling hair, and a delicate complexion, white and red, which was fully relieved against that dark background. The child's alarm had given way a little, but still, in the intervals of his meal, he would pause, look round him into the gloom, and clutch with speechless fright at his attendant, who held him close and soothed him with all the soft words she could think of. Little Lilias stood by her on the further side, sufficiently recovered to eat a biscuit, but securing herself also, brave as she was, by a firm grasp of the nurse's arm to which she hung, tightly embracing it with her own. Miss Brown was flitting about this strange little group, talking continuously, though the only one among them who was disposed to talk could not understand her, and the children were too worn out to pay any attention to what she said.

There was a little start and thrill among the three who held so closely together when the lady returned. Little Lilias put down her biscuit. She became the head of the party as

soon as Miss Musgrave came back—the plenipotentiary with whom to conduct all negotiations. Nello, on the other hand, buried his head in his nurse's shoulder. In the midst of all her agitation and confusion it troubled Miss Musgrave that the child should hide his face from her. The boy who was like herself and her family was the one to whom her interest turned most. Lilius bore another resemblance, which was no passport to Mary Musgrave's heart. Yet it was hard to resist the fascination of this child's sense and courage ; the boy, as yet, had shown himself capable of nothing but fear.

“Go, and have fires lighted at once in the two west rooms—make everything ready,” Mary said, sending Miss Brown away peremptorily. It was not a worthy feeling perhaps, but it vexed her, agitated as she was, to see that her maid woke no alarm in the children, while she, their nearest relation, she who, if necessary, had made up her mind to sacrifice everything for them, was an object of fear. She thought even that the children clung closer to their nurse and shrank more from herself when Martha was sent away. Miss Musgrave stood at the other side of the table and looked at them with many conflicting

thoughts. It was altogether new to her, this strange mixture of ignorance and wonder, and almost awe, with which she felt herself contemplating these unknown little creatures, henceforward to be wholly dependent upon her. They were afraid of her, but she was scarcely less afraid of them, wondering with an ache in her heart whether she would be able to feel towards them as she ought, to bring her middle-aged thoughts into sympathy with theirs, to be soft and gentle with them as their helplessness demanded. Love does not always come with the first claim upon it; how was she to love them, little unknown beings whose very existence she had never heard of before? And Mary thought of herself with a certain pity in this strange moment, remembering almost with a sense of injury that the fountain of mother's love had never been awakened in her at all. Was it thus to be awakened? She was not an angelic woman, as poor Mr. Pen imagined her to be. She knew this well enough, though he did not know it. She had been young and full of herself when the family misfortunes happened, and since then what had there been in her life to warm or awaken the heart? Was she capable of loving? she asked herself; was there not a chill atmo-

sphere about her, which breathed cold upon the children and drove them away? This thought gave her a pang, as she stood and looked at the two helpless creatures before her, too frightened now to munch their biscuits, one gazing at her with big pathetic eyes, the other hiding his face. An ache of helplessness and pain not less great than theirs came into her mind. She was as helpless as they were, looking at them across the table, as if across a world of separation which she did not know how to bridge over, with not only them to vanquish, but herself. At last she put out her hands with a sense of weakness, such as perhaps she had never felt before. She had not been able, indeed, to influence her father, but she had not felt helpless before him; on the contrary, his hardness had stirred her to determination on her side, and a sense of power which quickened the flowing of her blood. But before these children she felt helpless; what was she to do with them, how bring herself into communication with them? She put out her hands—hands strong to guard, but powerless she thought to attract. “Lilias, will you come to me?” she said, with a tremulous tone in her voice.

The weariness, the strangeness, the darkness

had been almost too much for Lilias ; her mouthful of biscuit and draught of milk had been too quickly interrupted by the return of the strange, beautiful lady, with whom she alone, she was aware, could deal. And she could not respond to that appeal without quitting hold of Martuccia, who, though powerless to treat with the lady, was still a safeguard against the surrounding blackness, a something to cling to. But the child was brave as a hero, notwithstanding the nervous susceptibility of her nature. She disengaged her arm slowly from her one stay, keeping her eyes all the time fixed upon Miss Musgrave, half attracted by her, half to keep herself from seeing those dark corners in which mysterious dangers seemed to lurk ; and came forward, repressing the sob that rose in her throat, her little pale face growing crimson with the strain of resolution which this effort cost her. It was all Lilias could do to move round the table quietly, not to make a rush of fright and violent clutch at the hand held out to her—even though it was the hand of a stranger, from which in itself she shrank. Mary put her arm round the little trembling figure, and smoothing away the dark hair from her forehead, kissed the little girl with lips that

trembled too. She would do her duty by her ; never would she forsake her brother's child ; and with the warmth of this resolution tears of pity and tenderness came into her eyes. But when Lilius felt the protection of the warm soft arm about her, and the tenderness of the kiss, her little heart burst forth with a strength of impulse which put all laws at defiance. With a sobbing cry she threw herself upon her new protector, caught at her dress, clung to her waist, nestled her head into her bosom, with a close pressure which was half gratitude, half terror, half nervous excitement. Mary was taken by storm. She did not understand the change that came over her. A sudden warmth seemed to come into her veins, tingling to her very finger-points. She too, mature and self-restrained as she was, began to weep, a sudden flood of tears rushing to her eyes against her will. "My child, my brave little girl !" she said almost unawares, recognising in her heart a soft surprise of feeling which was inexplicable ; was this what nature did, sheer nature ? she had never felt anything like it before. She held the child in her arms and cried over her, the tears falling over those dark curls which had nothing to do with the Musgraves, which even resembled another type

with which the Musgraves would have nothing to do !

As she stood thus overcome by the double sensation of the child's nestling and clinging, and by the strange, sudden development of feeling in herself, Mary Musgrave felt two soft touches upon her hand which were not mistakable, and which made her start and flush, with the decorum of an Englishwoman surprised. It was Martuccia, who, moved like all her race by quick impulses of emotion, had risen hastily to her feet in sympathy, and had kissed the lady's hand, and put forward her little charge to perform the same act of homage. This roused Mary from her momentary breaking down. She took the little boy by the hand whom she found at her feet, not quite so frightened as at first, but still holding fast by the nurse's skirts, and led them both into the house. They were too much awed to make any noise, but went with her, keeping close to her, treading in her footsteps almost, closer and closer as they emerged into one unknown place after another. Wonder kept them still as she took them through the cheerful lighted dining-room, and up the stairs. Eastwood was busy about his table, putting it in that perfect order which it was his pride to

keep up ("For who is more to me nor my family ? what's company ?" said Eastwood ; "it's them as pays me as I'm bound to please") ; but Eastwood was too good a servant to manifest any feeling. He had, of course, heard all about the arrival, not only from the gardener, but from every one in the kitchen ; and he was aware, as nobody else was, that there had been a private interview between the father and daughter, to which she had gone with a pale face, and come back with nostrils expanded, and a glow of resolution upon her. Eastwood was not an old servant, but he had learned all that there was to learn about the family, and a little more. His interest in the Musgraves was not so warm as that of cook for instance, who had been born in the place, and had known them from their cradles ; but he had the warm curiosity which is common to his kind. He gave a glance from beneath his eyebrows at the newcomers, wondering what was to become of them. Would they be received into the house for good ; and if so, would that have any effect upon himself, Eastwood ? would it, by and by, be an increase of trouble, a something additional to do ? He was no worse than his neighbours, and the thought was instinctive

and natural, for no one likes to have additional labour. "But he's but a little chap; it'll be long enough before he wants valeting—if ever," Mr. Eastwood said to himself. What would be wanted would be a nurse, not a valet; and if that black-eyed foreigner didn't stay, Eastwood knew a nice girl from the village whom the place would just suit. So he cast no unkindly eye upon the children as he went noiselessly about in his spotless coat, putting down his forks, which were quite as spotless. The sight of the table with its bouquet of autumn flowers excited Lilias. "Who is going to dine there?" she said, with a pretty childish wile, drawing down Miss Musgrave towards her to whisper in her ear.

"I am, Lilias."

"May we come too?" said the little girl. "Nello is very good—he does not ask for anything; we know how to behave."

"There will be some one else besides me," said Mary, faltering slightly.

"Then we do not want to come," said Lilias with decision. "We are not fond of strangers."

"I am a stranger, dear——"

"Oh no, you are Mary!" said the child, embracing Miss Musgrave's arm with her own

two arms clasped round it, and raising her face with the confidence of perfect trust. These simple actions made Mary's heart swell as it had not done for years—as indeed it had never done in her life. Other thrills there might have been in her day, but this fountain had never been opened before, and the new feeling was almost as strangely sweet to her as is the silent ecstasy in the bosom of the new mother, whose baby has just brought into the world such an atmosphere of love. It was like some strange new stream poured into her heart, filling up all her veins.

The firelight had already begun to sparkle pleasantly in the bedrooms, and Mary found herself suddenly plunged into those pleasant cares of a mother which make time fly so swiftly. She had found so much to do for them, getting them to bed and making the weary little creatures comfortable, that the bell rang for dinner before she was aware. She left them hastily, and put herself into her evening gown with a speed which was anxiously seconded by Miss Brown, who for her part was just as eager to get back to the children as was her mistress. Miss Musgrave did not know what awaited her when she went down stairs, or what battles she might have

to fight. She had another duty now in the world beyond that claimed by her father. He had no such need of her as these children, who in all the wide world had no protector or succour but herself. Her heart beat a little louder and stronger than usual ; her bearing was more dignified. The indifference which had been in her life this morning had passed away. How strange it seemed now to think of that calm which nothing affected much, in which she had been comparatively happy, but which now appeared so mean and poverty-stricken. The easy quiet had gone out of her life ;—was it for ever ?—and instead there had come in a commotion of anxieties, hopes, and doubts and questions manifold ; but yet how miserable to her in comparison seemed now that long loveless tranquillity ! She was another woman, a living woman, she thought to herself, bearing the natural burden of care, a burden sweetened by a hundred budding tendernesses and consolations. It is well to have good health and enough to do ; these had been the bare elements of existence, out of which she had managed to form a cold version of living ; but how different was this vivid existence, new-born yet eternal, of love and care ! She was like one inspired.

If she had been offered the alternative, as she almost expected, of leaving the house or giving up the children, with what pride would she have drawn her cloak round her and left her father's house! This prospect seemed near enough and likely enough as she walked into the dining-room, with her head high, and a swell of conscious force in her bosom. Whatever might be coming, she was prepared for any blow.

Mr. Musgrave, too, was late. He who was the soul of punctuality did not enter the room for a minute or more after his daughter had hastened there, knowing herself late—but whereas she had hurried her toilet, his had never been more careful and precise. He took his seat with deliberate steadiness, and insisted upon carving the mutton and partridge which made their meal, though on ordinary occasions he left this office to Eastwood. It gratified him, however, to-day, to prove to himself and to her how capable he was and how steady were his nerves. And he talked while he did this with unusual energy, going over again all the history of the “chief.”

“I hope it will interest the general reader,” he said. “Not many family questions do, but this is really an elucidation of history. It

throws light upon a great many things. You scorn heraldry, Mary, I am aware."

"No, I do not think I scorn it."

"Well, at all events you are little interested; the details are not of much importance, you think. In short, I suspect," he added, with a little laugh, "that if the truth were told, you and a great many other ladies secretly look upon the science as one of those play-sciences that keep men from being troublesome. You don't say so, but I believe you think we fuss and make work for ourselves in this way while you are carrying on the real work of the world."

"I am not so self-important," she said; but there was a great deal of truth in the suggestion if her mind had been free enough to think of it. What was it else but a play-science to keep country gentlemen too old for fox-hunting out of mischief? This is one of the private opinions of the gynæcæum applying to many grave pursuits, an opinion which circulates there in strictest privacy and is not spoken to the world. Mary would have smiled at the Squire's discrimination had her mind been free. As it was, she could do nothing but wonder at his liveliness and composure, and say to herself that he must be waiting

till Eastwood went away. This, no doubt, was why he talked so much, and was so genial. He did not wish to betray anything to the man, and her heart began to beat once more with renewed force as the moment came for his withdrawal. No doubt the discussion she feared would come, and most likely come with double severity then. She had seen all this process gone through before.

But when Eastwood went away the Squire continued smiling and conversational. He told her of a poacher who had been brought to him, a bumpkin from a distant farm, to whom he meant to be merciful; and of some land which was likely to be in the market, which would, if it could be got, restore an old corner of the estate and rectify the ancient boundary.

“I do not suppose there is any hope of such a thing,” he said, with a sigh. “And besides, what does it matter to me that I should care? my time cannot be very long.”

“The time of the family may be long enough,” she said, with a throb of rising excitement, for surely now he would speak; “one individual is not all.”

“That is a sound sentiment, though perhaps

it may seem a little cold-hearted when the individual is your father, Mary."

"I did not mean it to be cold-hearted ; you have always taught me to consider the race."

"And so you ought," he said, "though you don't care so much for the blazon as I could wish. I should like to talk to Burn and to see what the lawyers would think of it. I confess I should like to be Lord of the Manor at Critchley again before I die."

"And so you shall, father, so you shall !" she cried. "We could do it with an effort : if only you would—if only you could——"

He interrupted her hastily.

"When Burn comes to-morrow let me see him," he said. "This is no question of what I could or would. If it can be done it ought to be done. That is all I have to say. Is it not time you were having tea ?"

This was to send her away that he might have his evening nap after dinner. Mary rose at the well-known formula, but she came softly round to his end of the room to see that the fire was as he liked it, and lingered behind his chair, not knowing whether to make another appeal to him. Her presence seemed to make him restless ; perhaps he divined what was

floating in her mind. He got up quickly before she had time to speak.

“On second thoughts,” he said, “as I was disturbed before dinner, I had better resume my work at once. You can send me a cup of tea to the library. It is not often that one has such a satisfactory piece of work in hand ; that charms away drowsiness. Be sure you send me a cup of tea.”

“You will not — over-fatigue yourself, father ?” said Mary, faltering. “I — hope you will not do too much.”

This was not what she meant to say, but these were the only words that she could manage to form out of her lips.

“Oh, no ; do not be uneasy. I shall not overwork myself,” said the Squire once more, with a laugh.

And he went out of the room before her, erect and steady, looking younger and stronger in the force of that excitement which he was so careful to conceal. Mary did not know what to think. Was he postponing his sentence to make it more telling ? or was he, happier thought, moved by the new event as she herself had been, warmed into forgiveness, into relenting, into the happiness of old age in children’s children ? Could this be so ?

She stood over the fire in her agitation holding her hands out to the ruddy blaze, though she was not cold. Her heart beat violently against her breast. How uneasy a thing this life was, how restless and full of change and commotion! Yet so much more, so much greater than the gentler stagnation which was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE VICARAGE.

THE vicarage was stilled in the quiet of the evening, the children in bed, the house at rest. It was not the beautiful and dignified old house which in England is the ideal dwelling of the gentleman parson, the ecclesiastical squire of the parish. And indeed Mr. Pennithorne was not of that order. Though there had been many jokes when he first entered upon the cure as to the resemblance between his name and that of the parish, Pennithorne of Penninghame was a purely accidental coincidence. Mr. Musgrave was the patron, but the living was not wealthy enough or important enough to form that appropriate provision for a second son which, according to the curious subordination and adaptation of public wants to family interests, has become the rule in England, unique, as are so many others. Randolph Musgrave had his rectory in one of the

midland counties, in the district which was influenced by his mother's family, where there was something more worth his acceptance ; and his old tutor had got the family living. Mr. Pennithorne was not a distinguished scholar with chances of preferment through his college, and it had been considered a great thing for him when, after dragging the young Musgraves through a certain proportion of schooling and colleging, he had subsided into this quiet provision for the rest of his life. He was a clergyman's son, with no prospects, and whatsoever glimmerings of young ambition there might have been in him, there was no coming down involved when he accepted the small rural vicarage where his heart was. We have already said that in his wildest hopes a vision of the possibility of bringing Mary Musgrave to the vicarage to share his humble circumstances with him had never entered into Mr. Pennithorne's mind ; but to be near her was something, and to be her trusted and confidential friend seemed the best that life could give him. Here he had remained ever since, being of some use to her, as he hoped, from time to time, and some comfort at least, if nothing more, in the convulsions of the family. During the first years of his incumbency, Mr. Penni-

thorne's own mind had been subject to many convulsions as one suitor after another came to the Castle ; but as they had all ridden away again with what grace they could after their rejection, comfort had come back. It was a curious passion, and one which we do not pretend to explain. After a while, impelled by friends, by convenience, and by the soft looks of Emily Coniston, the daughter of the clergyman in his native place, to which he had gone on a visit, he had himself found it possible to marry, without any failure of his allegiance to his visionary love ; but still to this day, though he had been Emily's husband for ten years, it troubled the good vicar when any stranger came to the Castle whose society seemed specially pleasant to Miss Musgrave. He would hang about the place at such times like an alarmed hen when something threatens the brood, nor ceased to cluck and flutter his wings till the danger was over. Did he not wish her happiness ? Ah, yes, and would, he thought, have given his life to procure it ; but was it necessary that happiness should always be got in that one vulgar way ? Marriage was well enough for the vulgar, but not for Mary. It would have been a descent from her maiden dignity, a lowering of her position. He was

willing that everybody should love her and place her on a pedestal above all women ; but it wounded his finest feelings to think that she too, in her turn, might love. There was no man good enough or great enough to be worthy of awakening such a sentiment in Mary Musgrave's breast.

As is not unusual in such cases, Mr. Pennithorne, the chief inspiration of whose life was a visionary passion of the most exalted and exalting kind for a woman, had married a woman for whom no one could entertain any very exalted or impassioned feelings. Perhaps the household drudge is a natural double or attendant of the goddess. They "got on" very well together, people said, and Mr. Pen put up with his wife's little foolishnesses and fretfulnesses, as perhaps a man could not have done whose heart was fortified by no ideal passion. Emily was a good housekeeper of the narrow sort, caring very little for comfort, and very proud of her economy ; and she was a good mother of the troublesome kind, whose children are always in the foreground, always wanting something, always claiming her attention. Mr. Pen adored them, and yet he was glad when they were got to bed, when his wife could be spoken to without one child clinging

to her skirts, or another breaking in upon everything with plaintive appeals to mamma. But he took it for granted that this was how it must be, and that a more lovely course of life was impracticable. One woman excepted, all women, he thought, were like this ; it is thus that the dogmatisms of common opinion are formed and kept up ; and what could be done but to shrug his shoulders at the inevitable, escaping from it into his study, or with a sigh into that world of the ideal where imagination is never ruffled by the incidents of common life. The children were in bed on this October night, and everything was still. The vicarage was not a handsome house, nor was it old, but merely modern, badly-built, and commonplace, redeemed by nothing but its garden, which was large, and gave a pretty surrounding to the place in summer. But the night had become stormy, and the wind was raving in the trees, making their close neighbourhood anything but an advantage. Mrs. Pennithorne thought it extravagant to use two sitting-rooms, so the family ate and lived in the dining-room—a dark room papered and furnished as, in the days when Mr. Pen was married, it was thought right to decorate such places, with a red flock paper of a large

pattern, which relieved the black horsehair of the furniture. The room was not very large. It had a black marble mantel-shelf, with a clock upon it, and some vases of Bohemian glass, and a red and blue table-cover upon the table, about which there lingered always a certain odour of food, especially in cold weather, when the windows were closed. Mrs. Pennithorne sat between the fire and the table. She had some dressmaking in hand, which made a litter about—dark winter stuff for little Mary's frock ; and as she had no genius for this work, it was a lingering and confusing business with her, and made her less amiable than usual. The reason why her husband was there at all instead of being in his study was that the evening was cold ; but it had not yet become, according to Mrs. Pen's code, time for fires. There was one in the dining-room, for she had not been well ; but to light a second so early in October was against all her traditions, and Mr. Pen had been driven out of his study, where he had been sitting in his greatcoat, and now stood with his back to the fire, warming himself, poor man, in preparation for another spell of work at his sermon. He was thin, and felt the cold. It was this, she had just been saying, that had

brought him, and not any regard for her loneliness—which indeed was quite true.

“No, Emily,” he said, meekly, “for I have my work to do, you know; but while I am here, I hope you are not sorry to see me. The children were rather late to-night.”

“I am glad to keep them up a little for company,” she said. “It is not so cheerful sitting here all alone, hearing the wind roaring in the trees; and my nerves are quite gone. I never used to fear anything when I was a young girl, but now I start at every sound. I don’t mean to blame *you*—but it is lonely sitting by one’s self after being one of a large family.”

“No doubt—no doubt,” he said, soothingly. “I suppose we gain something as years go on, but we do lose something. That must be taken for granted in life.”

“I don’t like your philosophy, Mr. Pennithorne,” said Emily; “the way you have of always making out that things have to be! I don’t see it, for my part. I think a married woman should have a great deal to cheer her up that a girl can’t have—”

“My dear,” he said, “perhaps I am not much—and you know the parish is my first duty; but have you not the children?—dear

children they are. I do not think there can be any greater pleasure than one's children——”

“ You have nothing to do but enjoy them,” said Mrs. Pennithorne, slightly softened ; “ but if you had to work and slave like me ! There is never a day that I have not something to do for them ; mending, or making, or darning, or something. Fathers have an easy time of it ; they play with the baby now and then, take out the elder ones for a walk, and that is all. That is nothing but pleasure ; but to sit for days and work one's fingers to the bone——”

“ I wish you would not, Emily. I have heard you say that Miss Price in the village was a very good dressmaker——”

“ For those who can afford her,” said Mrs. Pennithorne. “ But,” she added, with a better inspiration, “ you make me look as if I were complaining, and I don't want to complain. Though it is dull, William, you must allow, sitting all the evening by one's self——”

“ But I have to do the same,” he said, with gentle hypocrisy. “ You know, Emily, if I wrote my sermon here, we should fall to talking, which no doubt is ^{far} pleasanter—but it is not duty, and duty must come before all——”

“There is more than one kind of duty,” said Mrs. Pennithorne, who was tearing her fingers with pins putting together two sides of Mary’s frock. While she was bending over this, the maid came into the room with a note. There was something in the “Ah!” with which he took it which made his wife raise her head. She was not jealous of Miss Musgrave, who was nearly ten years older than herself, an old maid, and beneath consideration; but she did think that William thought a great deal too much of the Castle. “What is it now?” she said pettishly. Perhaps once more—they had done it several times already—it was an invitation to dinner for Mr. Pennithorne alone. But he was so much interested in what he was reading that he did not even hear her. She sat with her scissors in her hand, and looked at him while he read the note, his face changing, his whole mind absorbed. He did not look like that when their common affairs were discussed, or the education of his children, which ought to be more interesting to him than anything else. This was other people’s business—and how it took him up! Mrs. Pennithorne was a good woman, and did her duty to her neighbours when it was very clearly indicated; but still, of course, nothing

could be of such consequence as your own family, and your duty to them. And to see how he was taken up, smiling, looking as if he might be going to cry ! Nothing about Johnny or Mary ever excited him so. Mrs. Pennithorne was not only vexed on her own account, but felt it to be wrong.

“ Well, life is a wonderful thing,” he said suddenly. “ I went to the Castle this afternoon——”

“ You are always going to the Castle,” she said, in a fretful voice.

“ —Expressly to tell Miss Musgrave how much my mind had been occupied about her brother John. You never knew him, Emily ; but he was my pupil, and I was very fond of him——”

“ You are very fond of all the family, I think,” she said, half-interested, half-aggrieved.

“ Perhaps I was,” he said, with a little sigh, which, however, she did not notice ; “ but John particularly. He was a fine fellow, though he was so hot-headed. The other night I kept dreaming of him, all night long—over and over again.”

“ That was what made you so restless, I suppose,” Mrs. Pennithorne put in, in a parenthesis. “ I am sure you have plenty belonging

to yourself to dream of, if you want to dream."

"—And I went to ask if they had heard anything, smiling at myself—as she did for being superstitious. But here is the wonderful thing: I had scarcely left, when the thing I had foreseen arrived. A carriage drew up containing John Musgrave's children—"

"Did you know John Musgrave's children? I never knew he had any children—"

"Nor did I, or any one!—that is the wonder of it. I felt sure something was happening to him or about him—and lo! the children arrived. It was no cleverness of mine," said Mr. Pennithorne with gentle complacency, "but still I must say it was a wonderful coincidence. The very day!"

Mrs. Pennithorne did not make any reply. She was not interested in a coincidence which had nothing to do with her own family. If Mr. Pen had divined when Johnny was to break his arm, so that they might have been prepared for that accident! but the Musgraves had plenty of people to take care of them, and there seemed no need for a new providential agency to give them warning of unsuspected arrivals. She put some more pins into little Mary's frock—the two sides of the little bodice

never would come the same. She pulled at them, measured them, repinned them, but could not get them right.

“I have heard a great deal about John Musgrave,” she said with a pin in her mouth. “What was it he did that he had to run away?”

“My dear Emily! don’t do that, for heaven’s sake—you frighten me; and besides, it is not—pretty—it is not becoming——”

“I think I am old enough by this time to know what is becoming,” said Mrs. Pennithorne with some wrath, yet growing red as she took out the pins. She was conscious that it was not ladylike, and felt that this was the word her husband meant to use. “If you knew the trouble it is to get both sides the same!” she added, forgetting her resentment in vexation.

It was a troublesome job. There are some people in whose hands everything goes wrong. Mrs. Pen shed a tear or two over the refractory frock.

“My dear! I hope it is not my innocent remark——”

“Oh no, it is not any innocent remark. It is so troublesome. Just when I thought I had got it quite straight! But what do you know about such things? You have nothing

to say to Mary's frock. You never would notice, I believe, if she had not one to her back, or wore the same old rag year after year——”

“Yes, Emily, I should notice,” said Mr. Pen with some compunction; “and I am very sorry that you should have so much trouble. Send for Miss Price to-morrow, and I will pay her out of my own money. You must not take it off the house.”

“Oh, William! William!” said his wife, “who is it that will suffer if your own money, as you call it, runs out? Do you think I am so inconsiderate as only to think of what I have for the house! Isn’t it all one purse, and will it not be the children that will suffer eventually whoever pays? No, your money shall not be spent to save me trouble. What is the good of us but to take trouble?” said Mrs. Pen with heroic fortitude.

Mr. Pen sighed. Perhaps he was more conscious of the litter of dressmaking than of this fine sentiment. But anyhow he did not give any applause to the heroine. He left indeed this family subject altogether, and after a momentary pause, said, half to himself, “John Musgrave’s children! Who could have thought it! And how strange it all is——”

“Really, Mr. Pennithorne,” said his wife, offended, “this is too much. I don’t believe you think one half so much of your own children as of those Musgraves. What did they ever do for us?”

“They did this for us, my dear, that but for them I should not have had a home to offer you—nor a family at all,” said the vicar with a little warmth. “I might have been still travelling with boys about the world—”

“Oh, William, not with your talents,” said his wife, looking at him with admiration. With all her fretfulness and insensibility to those fine points of internal arrangement for which he had a half-developed, half-subdued taste, Emily had still a great admiration for her husband. Now Mary Musgrave, who was, unknown to either, her spiritual rival, had no admiration for good Mr. Pen at all. This gave the partner of his life an infinite advantage. His voice softened as he replied, shaking his head :

“Unfortunately, my love, other people do not appreciate my talents as you do.”

“That is because they don’t know you so well,” she said with flattering promptitude. Mr. Pennithorne drew a chair to the fire and sat down. It was but rarely that he received

this domestic adulation ; but it warmed him, and did him good.

“ Ah, my dear, I fear I must not lay that flattering unction to my soul,” he said.

“ You are too modest, William ; I have always said you were too modest,” said Mrs. Pennithorne, returning good for evil. How little notice he had taken of her fine heroic feeling and self-abnegation ! Women are more generous ; she behaved very differently to him. And the fact was, he very soon began to think that old Mr. Musgrave had made use of him, and given him a very poor return. The vicarage was not much—and the Squire had never attempted to do anything more. It is sweet to be told that you are above your fate—that Providence owes you something better. He roused himself up, however, after a time out of that unwholesome state of self-complacency. “ What a strange state of affairs it is, Emily,” he said. He was not in the habit of making his wife his confidant on matters that concerned the Musgraves, but in a moment of weakness his resolution was overcome. “ What a painful state of affairs ! Mr. Musgrave knows of the coming of these children, but he takes no notice, and whether she is to be allowed to keep them or not——”

"Dear me, think of having to get permission from your father at her time of life," said Mrs. Pennithorne, with a naïve pity. "And whom did he marry, William, and what sort of person was their mother? I don't think you ever told me that."

"Their mother was—John's wife; I must have told you of her. She was not the person his family wished. But that often happens, my dear. It is no sign that a man is a bad man because he may make what you may call a mistaken choice."

"My dear William," said Mrs. Pen, with authority, "there is nothing that shows a man's character so much as the wife he chooses; my mother always said so. It is the best test if he is a nice feeling man or not," the vicar's wife said blandly, with a little conscious smile upon her face.

Mr. Pennithorne made no reply. There was something humorous in this innocent little speech, considering who the speaker was, to any one who knew. But then nobody knew; scarcely even Mr. Pennithorne himself, who at this moment was so soothed by his wife's "appreciation," that he felt himself the most devoted of husbands. He shook his head a little, deprecating the implied condemnation of

his old pupil ; for the moment he did not think of himself.

“Now that we are sitting together, and really comfortable for once in a way,” said Mrs. Pennithorne, dropping Mary’s bodice with all the pins, and drawing her chair a little nearer to the fire—“it does not happen very often—tell me, William, what it is all about, and what John Musgrave has done.”

Again the vicar shook his head. “It’s a long story,” he said, reluctantly.

“You tell things so nicely, William, I sha’n’t think it long ; and think how strange it is, knowing so much about people, and yet not knowing anything. And of course I shall have to see the children. Poor little things, not to be sure of shelter in their grandfather’s house ! but they will always have a friend in you.”

“They will have Mary ; what can they want more if they have *her* ?” he said suddenly, with a fervour which surprised his wife ; then blushed and faltered as he caught her eye. What right had he to speak of Miss Musgrave so ? Mrs. Pennithorne stared a little, but the slip did not otherwise trouble her, for she saw no reason for the exaggerated respect with which the Squire’s daughter was treated. Why

should not she be called Mary—was it not her name ?

“ Mary, indeed ! what does she know about children ? But, William, I am waiting, and this is the question—What did John Musgrave do ? ”

PART III.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHILDREN AT THE CASTLE.

THE arrival of the children was an era at Penninghame from which afterwards everything dated ; but the immediate result was a very curious and not very comfortable one. As they had been introduced into the house, so they lived in it. Mr. Musgrave never mentioned them, never saw them or appeared to see them, ignored their existence, in short, as completely as if his faculties had been deadened in respect to them. His life was in no way changed indeed ; the extraordinary revolution which had been made to every one else in the house by this change showed all the more strongly from the absence of all effect upon him. He read, he wrote, he studied, he took his usual quiet exercise exactly as he did before, and never owned by a word or look

that he was conscious of any alteration in the household. For a little while the children were hushed not to make a noise, and huddled away into corners to keep them out of sight and hearing; but that arrangement was too unnatural to continue, and it very soon happened that their presence was forced upon him by unmistakable signs, by both sight and hearing. But the Squire took not the slightest notice. He looked over their heads and never saw them. His ear was engaged with other sounds and he did not hear them. By this system of unconsciousness he deprived himself indeed of some evident advantages; for how can you interfere with the proceedings of those whose very existence you ignore? He could not give orders that the children should make less noise, because he professed not to be aware of their presence; nor send them out of his sight, when he was supposed not to see them; and in consequence this blindness and deafness on his part was perhaps a greater gain to them than to himself. The mental commotion into which he had been thrown by their arrival had never been known to any one but himself. He had a slight illness a few days after—his liver out of order, the doctor said; and so worked off his excitement without disclosing it to any

one. After this he resumed his serenity, and completed his heraldic study. The history of the augmentation granted to the Musgraves in the year 1393 in remembrance of the valour of Sir Egidio, or Giles, Musgrave in the Holy Land made rather a sensation among students in that kind. It was a very interesting monograph. Besides being a singularly striking chapter of family history, it was, everybody said, a most interesting contribution to the study of heraldic honours—how and why they were bestowed ; especially as concerning “augmentations” bestowed on the field for acts of valour—a rare and exceptional distinction. The Squire made a little collection of the notices that appeared in the newspapers of his “Monograph,” pasting them into a pretty little book, as is not unusual with amateur authors. He enjoyed them a great deal more than if he had been the author of a great history, and resented criticism with corresponding bitterness. He was very proud of Egidio, or Giles, who died in the fifteenth century ; and it did not occur to him that there was any incongruity between this devotion to his ancestors and the fact that he persisted in ignoring the little boy upstairs.

And yet day by day it grew more hard to

ignore him. Mr. Musgrave in his study, after the enthusiasm of his monograph was over, could not help hearing voices which it was difficult to take no notice of. The enthusiasm of composition did a great deal for him: it carried him out of the present; it filled him with a delightful fervour and thrill of intellectual excitement. People who are always writing get used to it, and lose this sense of something fine and great which is the inheritance of the amateur. Even after the shock of renewed intercourse with the son, who had brought shame upon his name, and whom he had cast off, Mr. Musgrave, so long as his work lasted, found himself able to forget everything in the happiness it gave. When he woke in the morning his first thought was of this important occupation which awaited him, and he went to bed with the fumes of his own paragraphs in his head; he was carried away by it. But when all this intellectual commotion was over, and when the *ennui* of having nothing further to do had swallowed up the satisfaction of having finished a great piece of work, as it so soon does, then there came a very difficult interval for the Squire. He had no longer anything to absorb him and keep him comfortably above the circumstances of

ordinary life ; and as he sat in his library, only reading, only writing a letter, no longer absorbed by any special study, or by the pride and delight of recording in fine language the results of that study, ordinary life stole back, as it has a way of doing. He began to hear the knocks at the door, the ringing of bells, and to wonder what they meant ; to hear steps going up and down the stairs, to be aware of Eastwood in the dining-room, and the rustle of Mary's dress as she went about the house in the morning, and in the afternoon passed with a soft boom of the swinging door into her favourite hall. The routine of the house came back to the old man. He heard the servants in the kitchen, the ticking of that measured, leisurely old clock in the hall which took about five minutes to spell out the hour. He was not consciously paying any attention to these things. On the contrary, he was secluded from them, rapt in his books, knowing nothing of what was going on ; yet he heard them all ; and as he sat there through the long winter days and the still longer winter evenings, when there was rain or storm out of doors, and nothing to break the long, still blank of hours within, a sound would come to him now and then, even before the care of the house-

hold relaxed—the cry of a little voice, a running and pattering of small feet, sometimes an outburst of laughter, a small voice of weeping, which stirred strangely in the air about him and vaguely called forth old half-extinct sensations, as one might run over the jarred and half silent keys of an old piano in the dark. This surprised him at first in his loneliness—then, when he had realized what it was, hurt him a little, rousing old wrath and bitterness, so that he would sometimes lay down his pen or close his book and all the past would come before him—the past, in which John his son had disappointed, mocked, insulted, and baffled his father. He would not allow himself to realize the presence of these children in the house, but he could not avoid thinking of the individual who stood between him and them, who was so real while they they were so visionary. Always John! He had tried to live for years without thought of him and had been tranquil ; it was grievous to be compelled thus to think of him again. This all happened, however, in the seclusion of his own mind, in the quiet of his library, and no one knew anything of it ; not his daughter, who thought she knew his looks by heart ; nor his servant, who had spelled him out by many

guesses in the dark—as servants generally do—and imagined that he had his master at his fingers' ends. But during all this time while these touches were playing upon him, bringing out ghosts of old sensations, muffled sounds and tones forgotten, Mr. Musgrave publicly ignored the fact that there were any children in the house, and contrived not to see them, nor to hear them, with a force of self-government and resolution which, in a nobler cause, would have been beyond all praise.

The effect of the change upon Miss Musgrave was scarcely less remarkable though very different. Her mental and moral education had been of a very peculiar kind. The tragedy which swallowed up her brother had interrupted the soft flowing current of her young life. All had gone smoothly before in the natural brightness of the beginning. And Mary, who had little passion in her temperament, who was more thoughtful than intense, and whose heart had never been awakened by any strong attachment beyond the ties of nature, had borne the interruption better than most people would have borne it, and had done her duty between her offending brother and her enraged father with less strain and violence of suffering than might have been imagined.

And she had got through the more quiet years since without bitterness, with a self-adaptation to the primitive monotony of existence which was much helped, as most such virtues are, by temperament. She had formed her own theory of life, as most people do by the time they reach even the earliest stages of middle age ; and this theory was the philosophical one that happiness, or the calm which does duty for happiness in most mature lives, was in reality very independent of events ; that it came from within, not from without ; and that life was wonderfully equal, neither bringing so much good, nor so much evil, as people of lively imaginations gave it credit for doing. Thus she had herself lived, not unhappy, except at the very crisis of the family life. She had suffered then. Who could hope (she said to herself) to do other than suffer one time or another in their life ? But since then the calm and regularity of existence had come back, the routine which charms time away and brings content. There had no doubt been expectations in her mind which had come to nothing—expectations of more active joy, more actual well-being, than had ever fallen to her lot ; but these expectations had gradually glided away, and no harm had been done. If she had no

intensity of enjoyment, neither had she any wretchedness. She had enough to do; her life was full, and she was fairly happy. So she said to herself; so she had said many a day to Mr. Pen, who shook his mildly melancholy head and dissented—as far as he ever dissented from anything said by Miss Mary. Her brother was lost—away—wandering in the darkness of the great world as in a desert. But if he had been near at hand, absorbed in his married life, his wife, who was not of her species, and his unknown children, would not he have been just as much lost to Mary? So she persuaded herself at least; and so lived tranquilly, happy enough—certainly not unhappy;—and why should an ordinary mortal, youth being over, wish for more?

Now, however, all at once, so great a change had happened to her, that Mary could no longer understand, or even believe in, this state of mind which had been hers for so many years. Perfectly still, tranquil, fearing nothing—when her own flesh and blood were in such warfare in the world! How was it possible? Wondering pangs of self-reproach seized her; mysteries of death and of birth, such as had never touched her maidenly quiet, seemed to surround her, and mock at her former ease.

All this time the gates of heaven had been opening and shutting to John. Hope sometimes, sometimes despair, love, anguish, want, pain, had struggled for him, while she had sat and looked on so calmly, and reasoned so placidly about the general equality of life. How could she have done it? The revelation was as painful as it was overwhelming. Nature seized upon her with a grip of iron, and avenged upon her in a moment all the indifferences of her previous life. The appeal of these frightened children, the solemn charge laid upon her by her brother, awoke her with a start and shiver. How had she dared to sit and look through calm windows, or on the threshold by her tranquil door, upon the struggles, pangs and labours of the other human creatures about her? Was it excuse enough that she was neither wife nor mother? had she therefore nothing to do in guarding, and continuing, and handing down the nobler successions of life? Mary was startled altogether out of the state of mind habitual to her. Instead of remaining the calm lady of the manor, the female squire, the lawgiver of the village which she had hitherto been—a little above the problems that were brought to her, a little wanting in consideration of motives and meaning, perhaps now and

then too decided in her judgment, seeing the distinction between right and wrong too clearly, and entertaining a supreme, though gentle contempt for the trimmings and compromises, as well as for the fusses and agitations of the ordinary world—she felt herself to have plunged all at once into the midst of those agitations at a single step. She became anxious, timorous, yet rash, faltering even in opinion, hesitating, vacillating—she who had been so decided and so calm. Her feelings were all intensified ; the chords of her nature tightened, as it were, vibrating to the lightest touch. And at the same time, which was strange enough, while thus the little circle, in which she stood, became full of such intense, unthought-of interest, the world widened around her as it had never widened before ; into darknesses and silences indeed—but still with an extended horizon which expanded her heart. John was there in the wide unknown, which stretched round this one warm, lighted spot, wandering she knew not where, a solitary man. She had never realized him so before ; and not only John, but thousands like him, strangers, wanderers, strugglers with fate. The sudden breath of novelty, of enlightenment, expanded her heart like a sob. Her composure, her

satisfaction, her tranquillity fled from her ; but how much greater, more real and true, more penetrating and actual, became her existence and the world ! And all this was produced, not by any great mental enlightenment, any sudden development of character, but by the simple fact that two small helpless creatures had been put into her hands and made absolutely dependent upon her. This was all ; but the whole world could not have been more to Mary. It changed her in every way. She who had been so rooted in her place, so absorbed in her occupations, would have relinquished all, had it been necessary, and gone out solitary into the world for the children. Could there be any office so important, any trust so precious ? This, which sounded like the vulgarest commonplace, and at the same time most fictitious high-flown sentiment, on the lips of Mrs. Pennithorne, became all at once, in a moment, the leading principle of Miss Musgrave's life.

But she had to undergo various petty inconveniences from the curiosity of her neighbours, and their anxiety to advise her as to what she should do in the "trying circumstances." What could she know about children ? Mrs. Pen, for one, thought it very important to

give Miss Musgrave the benefit of her advice. She made a solemn visit to inspect them, and tell her what she ought to do. The little boy, she felt sure, was delicate, and would require a great deal of care; but the thing that troubled Mrs. Pennithorne the most was that Miss Musgrave could not be persuaded to put on mourning for her brother's wife. Notwithstanding that it was, as Mary pleaded, five years since she died, the vicar's wife thought that crape would be a proof that all "misunderstandings" were over, and would show a Christian feeling. And when she could not make this apparent to the person principally concerned, she did all she could to impress it upon her husband, whom she implored to "speak to"—both father and daughter—on the subject. Most people would have been all the more particular to put on crape, and to wear it deep, because there had been "misunderstandings." "Misunderstandings!" cried Mr. Pen. It was not, however, he who spoke to Miss Musgrave, but she who spoke to him on this important subject; and what she said somewhat bewildered the vicar, who could not fathom her mind in this respect.

"Emily thinks we should put on mourning," she said. "And, do you know, I really

believe that is the reason that poor John is so much more in my thoughts?"

"What—the mourning?" the vicar asked faltering.

"*Her* death. Hitherto the idea of one has been mingled with that of the other. Now he is just John; everything else has melted away; there is nothing but himself to think of. He has never been only John before. Do you know what I mean, Mr. Pen?"

The vicar shook his head. He wondered if this could be a touch of feminine jealousy, knowing that even Mary was not perfect; and this gave him a momentary pang.

"I don't suppose that I should feel so;—I was very fond of John—but I, of course, could not be jealous—I mean of his love for one unworthy——"

"How do you know even that she was unworthy? It is not that, Mr. Pen. But she was nothing to us, and confused him in our minds. Now he is himself—and where is he?" said Miss Musgrave, with tears in her eyes.

"In God's hands—in God's hands, Miss Mary! and God bless him wherever he is—and I humbly beg your pardon," cried Mr. Pen, with an excess of compunction which she

scarcely understood. His feelings were almost too warm Mary thought.

And as the news got spread through those invisible channels which convey reports all over a country, many were the visitors that came to the Castle to see what the story meant, though they did not announce this as the object of their visit. Among these visitors the most important was Lady Stanton, who had been Mary's rival in beauty when the days were. They had not been rivals indeed to their own consciousness, but warm friends, in their youth and day of triumph; but events had separated the two girls, and the two women rarely met, and had outgrown all acquaintance; for Lady Stanton had been involved, almost more immediately than Mary Musgrave, in the tragedy which had so changed life at Penninghame, and this had changed their relations like everything else. This lady arrived one day to the great surprise of everybody, and came in with timid eagerness and haste, growing red and growing pale as she held out her hands to her old friend.

“We never quarrelled,” she said; “why should we never see each other? Is there any reason?”

“No reason,” said Miss Musgrave, making

room upon the sofa beside her. But such an unexpected appeal agitated her, and for the moment she could not satisfy herself as to the object of the visit. Lady Stanton, however, was of a very simple mind, and could not conceal what that object was.

“Oh, Mary,” she said, the tears coming into her eyes, “I heard that John’s children had come home. Is it true? You know I always took an interest——” And here she stopped, making a gulp of some emotion which, to a superficial spectator, might have seemed out of place in Sir Henry Stanton’s wife. She had grown stout, but that does not blunt the feelings. “I should like to see them,” she said, with an appeal in her eyes which few people could withstand. And Mary was touched too, partly by this sudden renewal of an old love, partly by the thought of all that had happened since she last sat by her old companion’s side, who was a Mary too.

“I cannot bring them here,” she said, “but I will take you to the hall to see them. My father likes them to be kept—in their own part of the house.”

“Oh, I hope he is kind to them!” said Lady Stanton, clasping her white dimpled hands. “Are they like your family? I hope

they are like the Musgraves. But likenesses are so strange—mine are not like me," said the old beauty, plaintively. Perhaps the trouble in her face was less on account of her own private trials in this respect than out of alarm lest John Musgrave's children should bear the likeness of another face of which she could not think with kindness. There was so little disguise in her mind, that this sentiment also found its way into words. "Oh, Mary," she cried, "you and I were once the two beauties, and everybody was at our feet ; but that common girl was more thought of than either you or me."

"Hush!" said Mary Musgrave, putting up her hand ; "she is dead."

"Is she dead?" Lady Stanton was struck with a momentary horror ; for it was a contemporary of whom they were speaking, and she could not but be conscious of a little shiver in her own well-developed person, to think of the other who was clay. "That is why they have come home?" she said, half under her breath.

"Yes ; and because he cannot carry them about with him wherever he goes."

"You have heard from him, Mary ? I hope he is doing well. I hope he is not—very—

heart-broken. If you are writing you might say I inquired. He might like to know that he was remembered ; and you know I always took—an interest——”

“I know you always had the kindest heart.”

“I always took an interest, notwithstanding everything ; and—will he come home ? Now surely he might come home. It is so long ago ; and surely now no one would interfere.”

“I cannot say anything about that, for I don’t know,” said Miss Musgrave ; “he does not say. Will you come and see the children, Lady Stanton ?”

“Oh, Mary, what have I done that you should call me Lady Stanton ? I have never wished to stand aloof. It has not been my doing. Do you remember what friends we were ? and I couldn’t call you Miss Musgrave if I tried. When I heard of the children I thought this was an opening,” said Lady Stanton, faltering a little. She told her little fib, which was an innocent one ; but she was true at bottom and told it ill ; and what difference did it make whether she sought the children for Mary’s sake, or Mary for the children’s ? Miss Musgrave accepted her proffered embrace with kindness, yet with

a smile. She was touched by the emotion of her old friend, and by the remnants of that “interest” which had survived fifteen years of married life, and much increase of substance. Perhaps a harsher judge might have thought the emotion slightly improper. But poor John had got but hard measure in the world ; and a little compensating faithfulness was a salve to his sister’s feelings. She led her visitor down stairs and through the narrow passage, in all her wealth of silk and amplitude of shadow. Mary herself was still as slim as when they had skimmed about these passages together ; and she was Mary still ; for once in a way she felt herself not without some advantage over Sir Henry’s wife.

Nello was standing full in the light when the ladies went into the hall, and he it was who came forward to be caressed by the pretty lady, who took to him all the more warmly that she had no boys of her own. Lady Stanton fairly cried over his fair head, with its soft curls. “What a little Musgrave he is !” she cried ; “how like his father ! I cannot help being glad he is like his father.” But when this vision of splendour and beauty, which Lilius came forward to admire, saw the

little girl, she turned from her with a slight shiver. "Ah!" she cried, retreating, "is that —the little girl?" And the sight silenced her, and drove her away.

CHAPTER VIII.

LADY STANTON.

LADY STANTON drove home from that visit with her heart and her eyes full. She was not intellectual, nor even clever, but a soft creature, made up of feelings easily touched, not perhaps very profound, nor likely to obscure to her the necessary course of daily living, but still true enough and faithful in their way. She might have been able to make sacrifices had she come in the way of them or found them necessary, but no such chance of moral devotion had come to her ; nor had any teachings of experience or philosophy of middle age, such as works upon the majority of us, hardened her soft heart, or swept away the little romantic impulses, the quick sensibilities of youth. A nature so fresh indeed was scarcely compatible with much exercise of the intellectual faculties at all. Lady Stanton rarely read, and never under any circumstances

read anything (of her own will and impulse) which rose above the most primitive and familiar elements ; but on the other hand, the gentle sentimentalities which she did read went straight to her heart. She thought Mrs. Hemans the first of poets, and cried her eyes out over Mr. Dickens's "Little Nell." Anything about an unhappy love, or about a dead child, would move her more than Shakespeare ; and she shed tears as ready as the morning dew. Practically, it is true, she had gone through a certain amount of experience like other people, and her everyday life was more or less affected by it ; but in her heart Lady Stanton was still the same Mary Ridley whose gentle being had been involved in the wildest of tragic stories, even though she had come down to so commonplace a daily routine now. That story, so long past, took the place in her being of all the poetry and romance which the most of us get glorified from the hands of genius ; and all her associations were attached to that one personal episode, which was unparalleled in life as she knew life. When she read one of the novels which pleased her, she would compare the situations in it with this ; when she lingered over the vague melodious verses which represented poetry to her, there

was always a little appropriation in her heart of their soft measures to the dim long past emergency. And now, here it was brought back upon her by every circumstance that could bring the past near. Her love—was it her love that was recalled to her ? But then there was no love in it properly so called. She had taken an interest in John Musgrave, her friend's brother—always had taken an interest in him ; but she had no right to do so at any time, being betrothed to young Lord Stanton, who, for his part, had forgotten her for the sake of that dressmaker's girl at Penninghame, to whom John Musgrave too had given his heart. What a complication it was ! Mary Ridley, who had a pretty property close to his, had been destined for Lord Stanton from the beginning of time, and the boy and girl had lightly acquiesced, and had been happy enough in the parental arrangement. They had liked each other—well enough ; they had been as gay as possible in the lightheartedness of their youth, and had taken this for happiness. Why should not they be happy ? they were exactly suited to each other. She was the prettiest girl in the county (except the other Mary), and he was proud of her sweet looks, and fond of her, certainly fond of her ; whereas she,

unawakened, undisturbed, notwithstanding the interest she had always taken in John Musgrave, would have made him the most affectionate and charming wife in the world. Thus the early story had flowed on all smoothness and sunshine, the flowers blooming, the sun shining ; until, one fatal day, young Lord Stanton, riding through Penninghame village on his way to the old Castle, had seen Lily, Miss Price's assistant, at the window of the dressmaker's parlour. Fatal day ! full of all the issues of death.

It is needless to inquire what manner of woman this Lily was, for whom these two men lost themselves and their existence. She did not know of any tragedy likely to be involved, but brushed about in her homely village way through these webs of fate, twisting the threads innocently enough, and throwing the weaving into endless confusion. Whether Lord Stanton was murdered by John Musgrave, as many people thought at first, or killed accidentally in a hot, sudden encounter, as most people believed now, was a thing which perhaps would never be cleared up. The guilty man (if he was guilty) had paid the penalty of his deed in exile, in poverty, in misery, ever since. His life had been as much broken off at that

point as Stanton's was who died—and the two families had been equally plunged into woe and mourning; though indeed it was the Musgraves who suffered most, by reason of the stigma put upon them, by the shame of John's flight and of his marriage, and by the fact that he was still a criminal pursued by justice, though justice had long slackened her pursuit. As for the Stantons, there was nobody to mourn much. Aunts and uncles and cousins console themselves sooner than fathers and mothers, and the boy brother, who had succeeded to the title, had been too young to be capable of sustained sorrow. Everybody at that time had sympathised with the young bride who had lost her future husband, and her coronet, and all the joys of life in this sudden and miserable way, for there was no concealing what the cause of the quarrel was, and that Lord Stanton had been unfaithful to the beautiful Mary. Nobody knew, however, the complication which gave her a double pang, the knowledge that not only the man who was her own property, her betrothed husband, but the man in whom, innocently in girlish simplicity, she had avowed herself to "take an interest," had preferred to her the village Lily, who was nobody and nothing,

who had not been blameless between them, and whom everybody condemned. Everybody condemned : but *they* loved her. Both of them ! this secret and poignant addition to her trial Mary Ridley never confided to any one, but it still thrilled through and through her at any allusion to that old long past tragedy. Both of them !—the man whose best love was due to her, and the man who had caught her own girlish shy eyes, all unaware to either, somehow, innocently, unavowedly, in such a visionary way as harmed no one ; both ! It was hard. She wept for them both tenderly, abundantly, for the one not less than the other ; and a little—with a cry in her heart of protestation and appeal—for herself, put aside, thrown over for this woman who was nothing, who was nobody, yet who was better beloved than she. All this had welled up in Lady Stanton's heart when she saw the little girl who had Lily's face. She had been unable to restrain the sting of old wonder and pain ; the keen piercing of the old wound which she had felt to her heart. Both of them ! and now a little ghost of this Lily, her shadow, her representative, had come back again to look her in the face. She cried as she drove back that long silent way by herself to Elfdale. It

was seldom she had the chance of being so long alone, and there was a kind of luxury about it, not unmixed with compunction and a sense of guilt.

For it still remains to be told how Mary Ridley came to be Lady Stanton, although Lord Stanton, who was the betrothed husband of her youth, had been killed, and all that apparently smooth and straightforward story had ended in grief and separation. She had married after some years a middle-aged cousin of her dead lover, Sir Henry Stanton, who had not long before come back from India where he had spent most of his life. It was but a poor fate for the beautiful Mary. Sir Henry had left his career and a full accomplished life behind him, when he first came to settle at Elfdale to the passive existence of a gentleman in the country, who could scarcely be called a country gentleman. He had been married and had children, a family of sons and daughters, and had only a second chapter of less vivid meaning, a sort of postscriptal life, to offer her. Why she had accepted him nobody could well say,—but she made him a good wife, kind, smiling, always gentle, though sadly put to it now and then to preserve unbroken the sweet good-temper with which nature had gifted her.

So fair and sweet as she was, to get only the remains of a man's heart after all, to be made use of as their chaperon and caretaker by his big, unlovely daughters; to have her own children, two dainty, lovely, fairy girls, kept in the background,—no more than “the little ones”—of no account in the house—all these things were somewhat trying, and a strange reversal of all that life had seemed to promise her, and all that had been indicated by the early worship which surrounded her youth. But perhaps few women could have carried this inappropriate fate so well. All those contradictions of circumstances, all those travesties of what might have been, met with no gloom or sourness of disappointment in her. The very fact that she was Lady Stanton carried with it a certain aggravation, a parrot-like adhesion to the letter and change of the spirit, such as had been in the promises made to Macbeth. Mary might have thought herself the victim of a perverse fate, keeping the word of promise to the ear and breaking it to the heart, had she been perversely disposed—but instead of that, all her thoughts at the present moment were occupied with the fact that she had taken an unfair advantage of Laura and Lydia, in not telling them where she was

going, that they might have come with her had they been so disposed. She had stolen a march upon them ; they would think it unkind. But then she could not have gone to Penninghame had Laura and Lydia been with her. Though they were so much less concerned than she had been, they kept up the Stanton feud with the Musgraves. They had no “interest” in John—on the contrary, they were of the few who still believed that he had “murdered” Lord Stanton—and would have had him hanged if he ever returned to England. They would not have entered the house, or permitted any kind inquiries in their presence. And therefore it was that she had stolen away without letting them know, and was at present conscious—in addition to all the jumble of emotions in her heart—of a certain prick of guilt.

The Stantons were a great county family as well as the Musgraves, but in a very different way. When the Musgraves had been at their greatest, the Stantons had been nobody. They were nothing more than persistent, thrifty folk at first, adding field to field, building on ever a new addition to their old house. Then wealth had come, and then local importance ; and last of all celebrity. The first who brought anything like fame to

the name, and introduced the race to the knowledge of the world, was a soldier, a general under the Duke of Marlborough, who got a baronetcy and a reputation, and had a handsome new coat of arms invented for him —very appropriately gained indeed, on the field of battle, just as the augmentation of the Musgraves' blazon had been gained, but a few hundred years too late unfortunately, and therefore not telling for nearly so much as if it had been won in the fifteenth century. The next man was a lawyer, who so cultivated that profession that it brought his son, in the reign of the Georges, to the bench, and a peerage —and since that time the family had taken their place among the magnates of the north country. Young Walter Lord Stanton was a much greater man than John Musgrave, though not half so great a man in one sense of the word. Two or three generations, however, tell just as much upon the individual mind as twenty, and the young peer was conscious of all his advantages over the commoner, without any sense of inferiority in point of race. And now the other Lord Stanton, Geoffrey, who had succeeded that unfortunate young man, was the greatest personage of his years in the district, regarded with interest by all his

neighbours and with more than interest by some; for was it not in his power to make one of his feminine contemporaries, however humble she might be by birth, and however poor in this world's goods, a great lady?—and so long as human nature remains as it is, this cannot cease to be a very potent attraction. Indeed the wonder is that young women should not be altogether demoralised by the perpetual recurrence of such chances of undeserved, unearned elevation. Young Lord Stanton could do this. He could give fine houses and lands, a title, and all the good things of this earth to his cousin Laura, or his cousin Lydia, or any other girl in the county that pleased him. Therefore it cannot be wondered at if his appearance fluttered the dovecotes with sentiments as powerful and more pleasant than those which fill the nests at the appearance of predatory hawk or eagle. But any such flutter of feeling was held in Elfdale to be an unwarrantable impertinence on the part of the other ladies of the county. Long ago, at the time when at six years old he had succeeded to his stepbrother, there had been a tacit family understanding to the effect that one of Sir Henry's daughters should be the young lord's wife. Sir Henry, though old

enough to have been the father of his murdered cousin, would have been his heir but for Geoff—and it was universally allowed to be hard upon him that when such an unlikely chance happened, as that young Lord Stanton should die, there should be this boy coming in the way forestalling his claim. Nobody had wanted that child who was suddenly turned into a personage of so much importance—not even his father, who had married with a single-minded idea of being comfortable in his own person, and who was much annoyed by the prospect of “a second family”—a prospect which was happily, however, cut short by his own speedy death. When therefore Walter Lord Stanton was killed, it was very generally felt that Sir Henry had a real grievance in the existence of the little stepbrother, who was in the way of everybody except his poor mother, whom the old lord had married to nurse him, and who had taken the unwarrantable liberty of adding little Geoffrey to the family. Poor little Geoff! he was bullied on all hands so long as his brother lived; and then, what a change came over his life and that of his mother, who was as pale and shy as her boy! Great good fortune may change even complexion, and Geoff as he grew to be a man was

no longer pale. But Sir Henry never quite got over the blow dealt him by this succession. He had not resented Walter. Walter was so to speak the natural heir—and nobody expected him to die; but when he did die, so out of all calculation, to think there should be that boy! Sir Henry did not get over it for years—it was a positive wrong not to be forgotten.

Accordingly, as a small compensation to his injured feelings, all the family had tacitly decided that Geoff should marry one of his cousins. This, it is true, was but a very small compensation, for Sir Henry was not the kind of parent who lives in his children and is indifferent to his own glory and greatness. Even now, fifteen years after the event, he was not an old man, and it made up very poorly for his personal disappointment that Laura or Lydia should share the advancement of which he had been deprived. Still it was so understood. Geoff paid many holiday visits at Elfdale, though there was no particular friendship between Sir Henry and the widowed Lady Stanton, who was Geoff's guardian as well as his mother, and things were going smoothly enough between the young people. They liked each other, and had no objection to be together as much as was possible, and

already the sisters had settled between them “which of us it is to be.” This Lydia, who was the most strong-minded, had thought desirable from the moment when she had become aware what was intended. “It does not matter at present,” she said, “we are none of us in love, and one is just as good as another; but we had better draw lots, or something—or toss up, as the boys do.” And what the mystic ordeal had been which decided this question we are unable to say, but decided it was in favour of Laura, who was the prettiest, and only a year younger than Geoff. Lydia, as soon as the die was cast, constituted herself the guardian of her sister’s fortunes so far as the young lord was concerned, and made herself into a quaint and really pretty version of a matchmaking mother on Laura’s behalf. Thus it will be seen that it was into the very heart of the opposite faction that Lady Stanton drove home with those tears in her soft eyes, and all that commotion of old thoughts in her heart. If they could have seen into it and known that it was the image of John Musgrave that had roused that commotion, what would these girls have said, towards whom she felt so guilty as having stolen a march upon them? “The murderer!” they

would have cried with a shriek of horror. Lady Stanton could not, it is clear, have taken them to Penninghame with her, and surely she had a right to use her own horses and carriage; but still she felt guilty as she subdued, with all the effort she could make, the excitement in her heart.

When she went in, she retired at once up stairs, and announced herself, through her maid, to have a headache, and had a cup of tea in her own room, to which her own children, little Fanny and Annie, a pair of inseparables, came noiselessly like two doves on the wing. Annie and Fanny liked nothing in the world so much as to get mamma to themselves like this, in the stillness of her room, with everybody else shut out. One was ten and the other eleven; they were about the same height, had the same flowing curly locks of light brown hair, the same rose-tinted faces, walked in each other's steps, or rather flew about their little world of carpeted stairs and passages, together, always in sudden soft flights —like doves, as we have said, on the wing “Is your head very bad, mamma?” they said; and the gentle hypocrite blushed as she replied. No, it was not very bad; a little quiet would make it quite well. They took off her

“things” for her, and brought her her soft white dressing-gown, in which she looked like the mother of all the doves, and let down her hair, which was not much darker, and quite as abundant as their own—and gave her her cup of tea, thus soothing every tingling nerve; and by this time Lady Stanton’s head was not bad at all, though now and then one of them would administer eau-de-cologne or rosewater. She told them of the children she had seen—little orphans who had no mother—and the two crept closer to her, to hear of that awful, incomprehensible desolation, each clasping an arm of hers with two small, eager hands. To be without a mother! Annie and Fanny held their breath in reverential silence and pity; but wondered a little that it was the little boy (“called Nello—what a funny name!”) that mamma spoke of, not the girl, who was ten (“just the same age as me”).

But not even the sympathy of her children, and the trance of interest which kept them breathless, could make Lady Stanton speak of the little girl. Her mother’s face! that face which had taken the best of everything in existence from Mary Ridley—how could Lady Stanton speak of it? She made some efforts to get over the feeling, but not with much

success. But the rest restored her, and enabled her to appear, her headache quite charmed away, and her nerves still, at dinner. She took a little more care with her toilette than usual, by way of propitiation to the angry gods. And though Laura and Lydia were not much short of twenty years younger than their stepmother, it would have been an indifferent judge who had turned from her to them, even in the fresh bloom of their youth. She came down stairs very conciliatory, ready to make the best of everything, and to make amends to them for all disloyal thoughts, and for having cheated them of their drive.

“I hope your head is better, my lady,” said Laura. “We have been wondering all the afternoon wherever you had gone.”

The girls had a certain strain of vulgarity in them somehow, which could not be quite eradicated from their speech.

“I went out for a drive as usual,” said Lady Stanton. “I thought I heard you say that you meant to walk.”

“Oh yes; we wanted to walk to the village to settle about the school children,” said Laura; and Lydia added, “But I am sure we never said so,” and looked suspiciously at her stepmother.

“ I went by the Langdale woods, and all the way to Penninghame water,” said the culprit, very explanatory. “ The lake looked so cold. I should not like to live near it. It chills all the landscape, and I am sure puts dreary thoughts into people’s heads. And as I was there, Henry,” she added, addressing her husband, “ I did what you will think an odd thing.” Lady Stanton’s bosom heaved a little, and her breath came quick. It would have been far easier to say nothing about it ; but then she knew by experience that everything gets found out. She made a momentary pause before the confession which she tried to treat so lightly. “ I ran in for a moment to the old Castle and saw Mary—Mary, you know. We were great friends, she and I, when we were young, and it was such a temptation passing the old place.”

“ What whim took you near the old place ? ” said Sir Henry, gruffly. “ I cannot think of any place in the world that should lie less in your way.”

“ Well, that is true,” she said, breathing a little more freely now that the worst was told, “ and the proof of it is that I have not been there for years.”

“I hope it will be still longer before you go again,” said her husband.

He did not say any more because of the servants, and because he had too much good sense to do or say anything that would lessen his wife’s importance; but he was not pleased, and this troubled her, for she had a delicate conscience. She looked at him wistfully, and was imprudent enough in her anxiety to pursue the subject, and make bad worse.

“It is strange to see an old friend whom you have known when you were young, after so many years,” she said; “though Mary is not so much altered as I am. You remember her, Henry? She was always so pretty; handsomer than—any one I know.”

It was on her lips to say “handsomer than ever I was,” which was the real sentiment in her mind—a sentiment partly originating in the semi-guilt and humility produced by the consciousness of having grown stout, a kind of development which troubles women. She was very deeply aware of this, and it silenced all the claims of vanity. She had lost her figure; whereas Mary was still slim and straight as an arrow. Whatever might have been

once, there was now no comparison between the two.

“Do you mean Miss Musgrave?” cried the girls, one after the other. “Miss Musgrave! that old creature—that old maid—that man’s sister?”

“She is no older than I am,” said Lady Stanton, with a flush on her face; “she was my dear friend in the old days. She is beautiful still, as much as she ever was, I think, and good; she has always been good.”

“That will do,” said Sir Henry, interposing. “We need not discuss the family; but I think you will see, my dear, that there could not be much pleasure in any intercourse at this time of day—whatever might have been the case when you were young.”

“Intercourse—there could never be any intercourse,” cried Lydia, coming to the front. “Fancy, papa! intercourse with such people—after all that has happened! That would be tempting Providence; and it would be an insult to Geoff.”

“Let Geoff take care of his own affairs,” said Sir Henry, angrily; and he gave a forcible twist to the conversation, and threw it into

another channel ; but Lady Stanton was very silent all the evening afterwards. She had wanted to conciliate, and she had not succeeded ; and how indeed could she, among her hostile family, keep up any intercourse with her old friend ?

CHAPTER IX.

AT ELFDALE.

NEVERTHELESS this meeting could not be got out of Lady Stanton's mind. She thought of it constantly; and in the stillness of her own room, when nobody but the little girls were by, she talked to them of the children, especially of little Nello, who had attracted her most. What a place of rest and refreshment that was for her, after all her trials with Laura and Lydia, and the seriousness of Sir Henry, who was displeased that she should have gone to Penninghame, and showed it in the way most painful to the soft-hearted woman, by silence, and a gravity which made her feel her indiscretion to her very heart. But notwithstanding Sir Henry's annoyance, she could not but relieve her mind by going over the whole scene with Fanny and Annie, who knew, without a word said, that these private talks in which they

delighted—in which their mother told them all manner of stories, and took them back with her into the time of her youth, and made them acquainted with all her early friends—were not to be repeated, but were their own special privilege to be kept for themselves alone. They had already heard of Mary Musgrave, and knew her intimately, as children do know the early companions of whom an indulgent mother tells them, to satisfy their boundless appetite for narrative. “And what are they to Mary ?” the little girls asked, breathless in their interest about these strange children. They had already been told ; but the relationship of aunt did not seem a very tender one to Annie and Fanny, who knew only their father’s sisters, old ladies to whom the elder girls, children of the first marriage, seemed the only legitimate and correct Stantons, and who looked down upon these little interlopers as unnecessary intruders. “Only their aunt !—is that all ?”

They were not in Lady Stanton’s room this time, but seated on an ottoman in the great bow-window, one on either side of her. Laura and Lydia were out ; Sir Henry was in his library ; the coast was clear ; no one was likely to come in and dismiss the children

with a sharp word, such as—"Go away, little girls—there is no saying a word to your mother while you are there!" or "The little ones again! When we were children we were kept in the nursery." The children were aware now that when such speeches were made, it was better for them not to wait for their mother's half-pained, half-beseeching look, but to run away at once, not to provoke any discussion. They were wise little women, and were, by nature, of their mother's faction in this house, where both they and she, though she was the mistress of it, were more or less on sufferance. But at present everybody was out of the way. They were ready to fly off, with their pretty hair fluttering like a gleam of wings, should any of their critics appear; but the girls had gone a long way, and Sir Henry was very busy. It was a chance such as seldom occurred.

"All? when children have not a mother, their aunt is next best; sometimes she is even better—much better," said Lady Stanton, thinking in her heart that John's wife was not likely to have been of any great service to her children. "And Mary is not like any one you know. She is a beautiful lady—not old, like Aunt Rebecca—though Aunt Rebecca

is always very kind. I hope you have not forgotten those beautiful sashes she gave you."

"I don't think very much of an aunt," said Fanny, who was the saucy one, with a shrug of her little shoulders.

"It must be different," said Annie, hugging her mother's arm. They were not impressed by the happiness of those poor little stranger children in being with Mary. "Has the little girl got no name, mamma—don't you know her name? You say Nello; but that is the boy; though it is more like a girl than a boy."

"It is German—or something—I don't remember. The little girl is called Lilias. Oh yes, it is a pretty name enough, but I don't like it. I once knew one whom I did not approve of——"

"We knew," said Fanny, nodding her head at Annie, who nodded back again; "Mamma, we knew you did not like the little girl."

"I! not like her! Oh, children, how can you think me so unjust? I hope I am not unjust," cried Lady Stanton, almost with tears. "Mary is very proud of her little niece. And she is very good to little Nello. Yes, perhaps I like him best, but there is no harm

in that. He is a delightful little boy. If you could have had a little brother like that——”

“We have only—big brothers,” said Annie, regretfully; “that is different.”

“Yes, that is different. You could not imagine Charley with long, fair curls, and a little tunic, could you?” This made the children laugh, and concealed a little sigh on their mother’s part; for Charley was a big dragoon, and Lady Stanton foresaw would not have too much consideration, should they ever require his help, for the little sisters whom he undisguisedly felt to be in his way.

“I wonder if she wishes he was a little girl.”

“I wonder! How she must want to have a sister! A little brother would be very nice, too; we used to play at having a little brother; but it would not be like Fanny and me. Does she like being at the Castle, mamma?”

It troubled Lady Stanton that they should think of nothing but this little girl. It was Lilius that had won their interest, and she could not tell them why it was that she shrank from Lilius. “They have left their poor papa all alone and sad,” she said, in a low voice. “I used to know him too. And

it must make them sad to think of him so far away."

Once more the children were greatly puzzled. They were not on such terms of tender intimacy with their father as were thus suggested, but, on the whole, were rather pleased than otherwise when he was absent, and did not follow him very closely with their thoughts. They were slightly humbled as they realized the existence of so much greater susceptibility and lovingness on the part of the little girl in whom they were so much interested, than they themselves possessed. How she surpassed them in this as well as in other things! She talked German as well as English (if it was German; their mother was not clear what language it was)—think of that! So perhaps it was not wonderful that she should be so much fonder of her papa. And a moment of silence ensued. Lady Stanton did not remark the confused pause in the minds of her children, because her own mind was filled with wistful compassion for the lonely man whom she had been thinking of more or less since ever she left Penninghame. Where was he, all alone in the world, shut out from his own house, an exile from his country—even his children

away from him, in whom perhaps he had found some comfort ?

This momentary silence was interrupted abruptly by the sound of a voice. "Are you there, Cousin Mary ? and what are you putting your heads together about ?"

At this sound, before they found out what it was, the children disengaged themselves suddenly each from her separate clinging to her mother's arm, and approached each other as if for flight ; but, falling back to their places when they recognised the voice, looked at each other, and said both together, with tones of relief, "Oh, it's only Geoff !"

Nothing more significant of the inner life of the family, and the position of these two little intruders, could have been.

Geoff came forward with his boyish step and voice in all the smiling confidence of youth. "I thought I should startle you. Is it a story that is being told, or are you plotting something ? Fanny and Annie, leave her alone for a moment. It is my turn now."

"O Geoff ! it is about a little girl and a boy — mamma will tell you too, if you ask her ; and there's nobody in. We thought at first you were papa, but he's so busy. Come and sit here."

Geoff came up, and kissed Lady Stanton on her soft, still beautiful cheek. He was a son of the house, and privileged. He sat down on the stool the children had placed for him. "I am glad there's nobody in," he said. "Of course the girls will be back before I go; but I wanted to speak to you—about something."

"Shall the children go, Geoff?"

"Fancy! do you want them to hate me? No, go on with the story. This is what I like. Isn't it pleasant, Annie and Fanny, to have her all to ourselves? Do you mind me?"

"Oh, not in the least, Geoff—not in the very least. You are like—what is he like, Annie?—a brother, not a big brother, like Charley: but something young, something nice, like what mamma was telling us of—a *little* brother—grown up—"

"Is this a sneer at my height?" he said; "but go on, don't let me stop the story. I like stories—and most other pleasant things."

"It was no story," said Lady Stanton. "I was telling them only of some children:—you are very good and forgiving, Geoff—but I fear you will be angry with me when you know. I was—out by myself—and notwithstanding all we have against them, I went to see Mary

Musgrave. There ! I must tell you at once, and get it over. I shall be sorry if it annoys you ; but Mary and I," she said, faltering, " were such friends once, and I have not seen her for years."

" Why should I be annoyed—why should I be angry ? I am not an avenger. Poor Cousin Mary ! you were out—by yourself!—was that your only reason for going ? "

" Indeed it is true enough. It is very seldom I go out without the girls : and they—feel strongly, you know, about that."

" What have they to do with it ? Yes, I know : they are *plus royalistes que le roi*. But this is not the story."

" Yes, indeed it is, my dear boy. I was telling Annie and Fanny of two poor children. They belong to a man who is—banished from his own country. He did wrong—when he was young—oh so many, so many years ago ! —and he is still wandering about the world without a home, and far from his friends. He was young then, and now—it is so long ago ; —ah, Geoff, you must not be angry with me. The little children are with Mary. She did not tell me much, for her heart did not soften to me as mine did to her. But there they are ; the mother dead who was at the bottom

of it all ; and nobody to care for them but Mary ; all through something that happened before they were born.”

Lady Stanton grew red as she spoke, her voice trembled, her whole aspect was full of emotion. The young man shook his head—

“I suppose a great many of us suffer from harm done before we were born,” he said, gravely. “This is no solitary instance.”

“Ah, Geoff, it is natural, quite natural, that you should feel so. I forgot how deeply you were affected by all that happened then.”

“I did not mean that,” he said, gravely. His youthful face had changed out of its light-hearted calm. “Indeed I had heard something of this, and I wanted to speak to you——”

“Run away, my darlings,” said Lady Stanton ; “go and see what—nurse is about. Make her go down with you to the village and take the tea and sugar to the old women in the almshouses. This is the day—don’t you remember ?”

“So it is,” said Annie. “But we did not want to remember,” said Fanny ; “we liked better to stay with you.”

However, they went off, reluctant yet

obedient. They were used to being sent away. It was seldom their mother who did it, willingly—but everybody else did it with peremptory determination—and the little girls were used to obey. They untwined themselves from her arms, to which they had been clinging, and went away close together, with a soft rush and sweep as of one movement.

“There go the doves,” said Geoff, looking after them with kind admiration like that of a brother. It pleased Lady Stanton to see the friendly pleasure in them which lighted the young man’s eyes. Whoever married him, he would, always, she thought, be a brother to her neglected children, who counted for so little in the family. She looked after them with that mother-look which, whether in joy or sorrow, is close upon tears. Then she turned to him with eyes softened by that unspeakable tenderness :

“Whatever you wish,” she said. “Tell me, Geoff ; I am ready to hear.”

“I am as bad as the rest. You have to send them away for me too.”

“There is some reason in it this time. If you have heard about the little Musgraves you know how miserable it all is,” said Lady Stanton. “The old man will have nothing to

say to them. He lets them live there, but takes no notice—his son's children! And Mary has everything upon her shoulders."

"Cousin Mary, will it hurt you much to tell me all about it?" said the young man. "Forgive me, I know it must be painful; but all that is so long over, and everything is so changed——"

"You mean I have married and forgotten," she said, her lips beginning to quiver.

"I scarcely remember anything about it," said Geoff, looking away from her that his eyes might not disturb her more, "only a confused sort of excitement and wretchedness, and then a strange new sense of importance. We had been nobodies till then—my mother and I. But I have heard a few things lately. Walter,—will it pain you if I speak of him?"

"Poor Walter!—no. Geoff, you must understand that Walter loved somebody else better than me."

She said this half in honest avowal of that humiliation which had been one of the great wonders of her life, partly in excuse of her own easy forgetfulness of him.

"I have heard that too, Cousin Mary, with wonder; but never mind. He paid dearly for his folly. The other——"

“Geoff,” said Lady Stanton, with a trembling voice, “the other is living still, and he has paid dearly for it all this time. We must not be hard upon him. I do not want to excuse him—it would be strange if I should be the one to excuse him ; but only——”

“I am very sorry for him, Cousin Mary. I am glad you feel as I do. Walter may have been in the wrong for anything I know. I do not think it was murder.”

“That I am sure it was not ! John Musgrave was not the man to do a murder—oh, no, no ; Geoff ! he was not that kind of man !”

Geoff looked up surprised at her eager tone and the trembling in her voice.

“You knew him—well ?” he said, with that indifferent composure with which people comment upon the past, not knowing what depths those are over which they skim so lightly. Could he have seen into the agitation in Lady Stanton’s heart ! But he would not have understood nor realized the commotion that was there.

“I always—took an interest in him,” she said, faltering ; and then she felt it her duty to do her best for him as an old friend. “I had known him all my life, Geoff, as well as I knew Walter. He was hasty and high spirited,

but so kind—he would have gone out of his way to help any one. Before he saw that young woman everybody was fond of John."

"Did you know *her* too?"

"No, no; I did not know her. God forbid! She was the destruction of every one who cared for her," said Lady Stanton with a little outburst. Then she made an effort to subdue herself. "Perhaps I am not just to her," she said with a faint smile. "She was preferred to me, you know, Geoff; and they say a woman cannot forget that—perhaps it is true."

"How could he? was he mad?" Geoff said. Geoff was himself tenderly, filially in love with his cousin Mary. He thought there was nobody in the world so beautiful and so kind. And even now she was not understood as she ought to be. Sir Henry thought her a good enough wife, a faithful creature, perfectly trustworthy, and so forth. It was in this light that all regarded her. Something better than an upper servant, a little dearer than a governess; something to be made use of, to do everything for everybody. She who, Geoff thought in his enthusiasm, was more lovely and sweet than the youngest of them, and ought to be held pre-eminent and sacred by

everybody round her. This was not the lot that had fallen to her in life.

“So I am not the best judge, you see,” said Lady Stanton with a little sigh. “In those days one felt more strongly perhaps. It all seems so vivid and clear,” she added half apologetically, though without entirely realizing how much light these half confessions threw on her present state of less lively feeling, “that is the effect of being young——”

“I think you will always be young,” he said tenderly; then added after a pause, “Was it a quarrel about—the woman?——” He blushed himself as he said so, feeling the wrong to her—yet only half knowing the wonder it was in her thoughts, the double pain it brought.

“I think so. They were both fond of her; and Walter ought not to have been fond of her. John—was quite free. He was in no way engaged to any one. He had a right to love her if he pleased. But Walter interfered, and he was richer, greater, a far better match. So I suppose she wavered. This is my own explanation of it. They met then when their hearts were wild against each other, and there was a struggle. Ah, Geoff! Has it not cost John Musgrave his life as well as Walter?

Has he ever ventured to show himself in his own country since? And now their poor little children have come home to Mary; but he will never be able to come home."

"It is hard," said Geoff thoughtfully. "I wish I knew the law. Fifteen years is it? I was about six then. Could anything be done? I wonder if anything could be done."

She put her hand on his shoulder with an affectionate caressing touch, "Thanks for the thought, my dear boy—even if nothing could be done."

"You take a great deal of interest in him, Cousin Mary?"

"Yes," she said quickly; "I told you we were all young people together; and his sister was my dear friend. We were called the two Maries in those days. We were thought—pretty," she said with a vivid blush and a little laugh. "You may have heard?"

Geoff kissed the pretty hand which had been laid on his shoulder, and which was perhaps a little fuller and more dimply than was consistent with perfection. "I have eyes," he said, with a little of the shyness of his years, "and I have always had a right as a Stanton to be proud of my cousin Mary. I wonder if Miss Musgrave is as beautiful

as you are; I don't believe it for my part."

"She is far prettier—she is not stout," said Lady Stanton with a sigh; and then she laughed, and made her confession over again with a half jest, which did not make her regret less real, "and I have lost my figure. I have developed, as people say. Mary is as slim as ever. Ah, you may laugh, but that makes a great difference; I feel it to the bottom of my heart."

Geoff looked at her with tender admiration in his eyes. "There has never been a time when I have not thought you the most beautiful woman in all the world," he said, "and that all the great beauties must have been like you. You were always the dream of fair women to me—now one, now the other—all except Cleopatra. You never could have been like that black-browed witch——"

"Hush! boy. I am too old to be flattered now; and I am stout," she said, with that faint laugh of annoyance and humiliation just softened by jest. Geoff's honest praise brought no blush to her soft matronly cheeks, but she liked it, as it pleased her when the children called her "Pretty Mamma." They loved *her* the best, though people had not always done

so. The fact that she had grown stout did not affect their admiration. Only those who have known others to be preferred to themselves can realize what this is. After a moment's hesitation, she added in a low voice : “I wonder—will you go and see them ? It would have a great effect in the neighbourhood. Oh, Geoff, forgive me if I am saying too much ; perhaps it would not be possible, perhaps it might be wrong in your position. You must take the advice of somebody more sensible, less affected by their feelings. Everybody likes you, Geoff, and you deserve it, my dear ; and you are Lord Stanton. It would have a great effect upon the county ; it would be almost like clearing him——”

“Then I will go—at once—this very day,” said Geoff, starting up.

“Oh no, no, no,” she said, catching him by the arm ; “first of all you must speak to—some one more sensible than me.”

CHAPTER X.

THE OTHER SIDE.

WHILE Lady Stanton spread the news of the arrival of the Musgrave children among the upper classes, this information was given to the lower, an equally or perhaps even more important influence in their history, by an authority of a very different kind, to whom, indeed, it would have been bitter to think that she was the channel of communication with the lower orders. But such is the irony of circumstances that it was Mrs. Pennithorne, who prided herself upon her gentility, and who would have made any sacrifice rather than descend to a sphere beneath her, who conveyed the report, which ran through the village like wildfire, and which spread over the surrounding country as rapidly and effectually as if it had been made known by beacons on the hill-tops. The village was more interested in the news than any other circle in the county could

be, partly because the reigning house in a village is its standing romance, the drama most near to it, and most exciting when there is any drama at all; and partly for still more impressive personal reasons. The Castle had done much for the district in this way, having supplied it with more exciting food in the way of story and incident than any other great house in the north country. There had been a long interval of monotony, but now it appeared to all concerned that the more eventful circle of affairs was about to begin again. The manner in which the story fully reached the village was simple enough. Mrs. Pennithorne had, as might have been expected, failed entirely with Mary's frock. It would not "come" as she wanted it to come, let her do what she would; and when all her own efforts had failed, and the stuff was effectually spoiled, soiled, and crumpled, and incapable of ever looking better than second-hand under any circumstances, she called in the doctor, as people are apt to do when they have cobbled at themselves in vain. The dress doctor in Penninghame and the neighbourhood, the rule of fashion, the grand authority for everything in the way of *chiffons*, was a certain Miss Price, a lively little old woman,

who had one of the best houses in the village, where she let lodgings on occasion, but always made dresses. She had been in business for a great many years, and was an authority both up and down the water. It was not agreeable to Miss Price to be called in at the last moment as it were, to heal the ailments of Mary's frock ; but partly because it was the clergyman's house, and partly because of the gossip which was always involved, she obeyed the summons, as she had done on many previous occasions. And she did her best, as Mrs. Pennithorne had done her worst, upon the little habiliment. "Ladies know nothing about such things," the little dressmaker said, pinning and unpinning with energetic ease and rapidity. And the Vicar's wife, who looked on helpless but admiring, accepted the condemnation because of the flattery involved ; for Mrs. Pen was elevated over Miss Price by so brief an interval that this accusation was a kind of acknowledgment of her gentility, and did her good, though it was not meant to be complimentary. She liked to feel that hers was that ladylike uselessness which is only appropriate to high position. She simpered a little, and avowed that indeed she had never been brought up to know about such things ;

and while Miss Price put the spoiled work to rights the Vicar's wife did her best to entertain the beneficent fairy who was bringing the chaos into order. She did not blurt out suddenly the news with which she was overbrimming, but brought it forth cunningly in the course of conversation in the most agreeable way.

"Is there any news, Miss Price?" she said; "but I tell the Vicar that nothing ever happens here. The people don't even die."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am. There's two within the last three months; but to be sure they were long past threescore and ten."

"That is what I say. It's so healthy at Penninghame. Look at the old Squire now, how hale and hearty he is—and after all he has come through."

"Yes, he has come through a deal," said Miss Price, putting her pins in her mouth, "and that's too true."

"Poor old man; and still more and more to put up with. Have you seen the children, Miss Price? Oh dear! didn't you know? Perhaps I ought not to have mentioned it; but people cannot hide up children as they hide secrets. I have been living here for ten

years, and I scarcely know the rights of the story about John Musgrave yet."

"Children!" said Miss Price, with a start which shook the pins out of her fingers. "To be sure—that came in a coach from Pennington with a play-acting sort of a woman? But what has that to do with Mr. John?"

The dressmaker dropped Mary's frock upon her knees in the excitement of her feelings. There was more than curiosity involved. "To be sure," she said. "To be sure!" going on with her own thoughts, "where should they come but to the Castle? and who should have them but his family? 'Lizabeth Bampffylde is an honest woman, but not even me, I wouldn't trust the children to her. His children! though they would be hers too——"

"What do you mean, Miss Price?" said Mrs. Pen, half offended; "are you going out of your senses? I tell you something about the Squire's family, and you get into a way about it as if it could be anything to you."

Miss Price recovered her composure with a rapid effort, but her little pale countenance reddened.

"Nothing to me, ma'am," she said, with what she felt to be a proper pride. "But if

Mr. John has children, they had a mother as well as a father ; and there was a time when that was something to me."

" Oh ! " cried the Vicar's wife, " then you knew Mrs. John ? tell me about her. She was a low girl, that is all I know."

" She was no low girl, whoever told you," cried the little dressmaker. " She was one as folks were fond of, as fond as if she had been a princess. She was no more low than—I am ; she was——"

" Oh, I did not mean to offend you, Miss Price. Of course I know how respectable you are—but not the equal of the Squire, you know, or of——"

Miss Price looked at the woman who had spoiled Mary's frock. There she stood, limp, and faded, and genteel, with no capacity in her fingers and not much in her head, with a smile of conscious superiority yet condescension. Miss Price was not her equal. " Good Lord ! as if I would be that useless," she said to herself, " for all the money in the world ! or to be as grand as the Queen ! " But though she was at once exasperated and contemptuous, politeness and policy at once forbade her to say anything. She would not " set up her face to a lady," even when so very unim-

pressive as Mrs. Pennithorne ; and it did not become the dressmaker in the village to be openly scornful of the Vicar's wife. She saved herself by taking up again with energy and devotion the scattered pins and the miserable little spoiled bodice of Mary's frock.

“I am glad you know about this girl,” said Mrs. Pen, satisfied to have subdued her opponent, “for I want so much to hear about her. One cannot get much information from a gentleman, Miss Price. They tell you, ‘Oh yes, she was a pretty creature !’ as if that is all you cared to know.”

“It's what tells most with the gentlemen, ma'am,” said Miss Price, recovering her composure. “Yes, that she was. I've looked at her many a time and said just the same to myself. ‘Well, you are a pretty creature !’ I don't wonder if their heads get turned when they are as pretty as that ; though it isn't only the pretty ones that get their heads turned. The girls that I've had through my hands ! and not one in ten that went through with the business and kept it up as it ought to be kept up.”

“Was Mrs. John Musgrave in the business ? Was she in your hands ? I declare ! Did he marry her from your house ?”

“She was come of wild folks,” said Miss Price; “there was gipsy blood in them. They had a little bit of a sheep farm up among the hills in their best days, and a lone house, where there wasn’t a stranger to be seen twice in a year. ’Elizabeth Bampffylde, that’s her mother, comes about the village still. I can’t tell you what she does, she sells her eggs and chickens, and maybe she does tell fortunes. I won’t say. She never told me mine. I took a fancy to the lass, and I said, ‘Bring her to me. I’ll take her; I’ll train her a bit.’ Oh, how little we know! If I had but let her bide on the fells!—but what a pretty one she was! Such eyes as she had; and a skin that wasn’t to say dark—it was brown, but so clear! like the water when the sun is in it.”

“You seem to think a great deal of people being pretty.”

“So I do, ma’am, more than I ought. A woman should have more sense. I’m near as easy led away as the gentlemen. But there’s different kinds of beauty, and that is what *they* never see as want it most. There’s pretty faces that I can’t abide. They seem to give me a turn. Now that’s where the men fails,” said the little dressmaker; “all’s one to them, good or bad, they never see any difference.

Lily was never one of the bad ones, poor dear. Lily ? yes, that was the young woman ; but she's not such a young woman, not a girl now. She'll be thirty-seven or eight, close upon that, if she's living this day."

"She is not living—she died five years ago ; and Miss Musgrave won't believe me that she ought to go into black for her," said Mrs. Pennithorne.

"Ah!" said Miss Price with a sharp cry. She dropped her work at her feet with an indifference to it which deeply aggrieved Mrs. Pen. The announcement took her altogether by surprise, and went to her heart. "Dead ! oh my poor Lily, my poor Lily ! Was I thinking ill o' thee ? Dead ! and so many left—and her in her prime !" Sudden sobs stopped the good little woman's speech, with which she struggled as she went on, making a brave effort to recover herself as she picked up the little dress. "I beg your pardon, ma'am, but it was so sudden ; it took me unprepared. Oh, ma'am, that's the worst of it when you have to do with girls. Few of them go through with the business, though it would be best for them ; they turn every one to her own way ; that's scripture, but I mean it. They marry, and they think themselves so

grand with their children, and it kills 'em. Oh, if I had but left her on the fells ! or if she had stuck by the business like me ! ”

“ I did not think you took so much interest in her,” said Mrs. Pen, feeling guilty. “ If I had known you cared, I would have been more careful what I said. But nobody seemed to think much of *her*. It is always the Musgraves the Vicar speaks of.”

“ The Vicar thought of nothing but Miss Mary,” said Miss Price hastily ; then she corrected herself, “ I mean of womanfolk,” she said ; “ the Musgraves, ma'am, as you say, that was all he thought of. And that's always the way, as far as I can judge. The gentry thinks of their own side, and we that are but small folks, we think of ours ; it's natural. Miss Musgrave was not much to me. I never made her but one thing, and that was a cotton, a common morning frock ; she was too grand to have her things made by the likes of me ; but Lily, she sat by my side and sewed at the same seam. And she's dead ! the bonniest lass on all the water, as the village folks say.”

“ You don't talk like the village folks, Miss Price.”

“ No. I'm from the south, as they call it

—except when a word creeps in now and again through being so long here. It's all pinned and straight, ma'am, now. It was done almost before I heard the news—and I'm glad of it, for my eyesight goes when I begin to cry. I don't think you can go wrong now," said Miss Price with a sigh, knowing the powers of her patroness in that direction. "It's as well as I can make it—pinned and basted, and straight before your hand. No, thank you kindly, nothing for me. I'm that put out that the best thing I can do is to get home."

"But dear me, Miss Price—as she is not even a relation!"

"A relation, what's that? A girl that you've brought up is more than a relation," cried the dressmaker, forgetting her manners. And she made up her patterns tremulously in a little bundle, and hurried out with the briefest leavetaking, which was not civil, Mrs. Pennithorne said indignantly. But Miss Price, in her way, was as important as the Vicar's wife herself, being alone in her profession, and enjoying a monopoly. It is possible to be rude, when you are a monopolist, without damage to your trade; but this, to do her justice, was not the motive which actuated

the little dressmaker, who, in her nature, was anxiously polite, and indisposed to offend any one ; but the news she had heard was too much for all her little decorums. She made a long round out of her way to pass by the Castle, though she could scarcely tell why she did so—for it was not the children that were most in her mind. Indeed she scarcely remembered them at all, in her excitement of pain and hot grief which took the shape of a kind of fiery resentment against life and nature. Children ! what was the good of the children—helpless things that took a woman's life, and made even the rest of death bitter to her, wringing her heart with misery to leave them after costing her her life ! She was an old maid not by accident, but by nature ; and what were a couple of miserable little children in exchange for the life of Lily ? But when, not expecting to see them, not thinking of them save in this bitter way, Miss Price saw the two children at the door of the hall, another quick springing sensation rose suddenly in her hasty soul. She went slowly past, gazing at them, trying to say to herself that she hated the sight of them, Lily's slayers ! But her kind heart was too much for her quick temper, and as soon as they were out of sight,

the little dressmaker sat down by the wayside and cried, sobbing like a child. Little dreadful creatures, who had worn their mother to death, and killed her in her prime ! Poor little forlorn orphans, without a mother ! She did not know which feeling was the warmest and strongest. But she reached home so shaken between the two emotions, that her present assistant, who filled the place to which Miss Price had hoped to train Lily, and who was a good girl with no nonsense in her head, fully intending to go through with the business, was frightened by the appearance of her principal, who stumbled into the little parlour all garlanded with paper patterns, with tremulous step and blanched cheeks, as if she had seen a ghost.

“Something’s to do !” cried the girl.

Miss Price made no immediate reply, but sank into a chair to get her breath.

“Oh, nothing ; nothing you know of,” she said at last, “nothing that need trouble you ;” and then after a pause, “nothing that will warn you even, not one of you, silly things. You’d all do just the same to-morrow, though it was to cost you your lives.”

“I’ll run and get you a cup of tea,” said Sarah, which showed her to be a young woman

of sense. Where lives the woman to whom this cordial, promptly and as it were accidentally administered, does not do good ? Miss Price gradually recovered herself as she sipped the fragrant tea, and told her story with many sighs and lamentations, yet not without a certain melancholy pleasure.

“ If girls would only think,” she said ; “ if they would take a warning ; but ne’er a one of you will do that. You think it’s grand to marry a gentleman ; but it would be far better to go through with the business like I’ve done, far better ! though you’ll never think so.”

Sarah was respectfully sympathetic ; she shook her head with a look of awe and melancholy acquiescence ; but nevertheless she did not think so. She was only twenty, and thirty-seven was a good age. To marry a gentleman, even at the risk of dying at thirty-seven like Lily, was better than living till sixty like Miss Price ; but she did not say so. She acquiesced, and even cried over the lost Lily, whom she had never seen, with the easy emotion of a girl. She herself meant sincerely to go through with the business ; but anyhow Sarah was as much excited by the news as heart could desire. Miss Price was very de-

terminated that it should not be talked of, that the story should not be spread in the village. "Don't let them say *again* it came from us," she said; but however that might be, before the next morning it had spread through the parish, and beyond the parish. Such things get into the atmosphere. What can conceal a secret? It is the one thing certain to be found out, and which every one is bound to know. There was nothing else talked about in the cottages or when neighbours met, for some days. The men talked of it over their beer, even, in the public-houses. "She were a bonnie lass," the elder ones said; and all the girls in the district felt that they individually might have been Lily, and felt sad for her. The children (who could not be hid) were followed by eager looks of curiosity when they appeared, and the resemblance of Lilius to her mother was too remarkable not to strike every one who had known her; and the entire story which had excited the district so deeply in its time, and which, with its mixture of all the sentiments which are most interesting to humanity, was almost as exciting still as ever, was retold, a hundred times over, for the benefit of the younger generation. In these lower regions, as was natural, the interest all centred in the

beautiful girl, who, though "come of wild folk," and not even an appropriate bride for a well-to-do hopeful of the village, had "the offer of" two gentlemen, one the young lord, and the other the young squire. Had such fortune ever come before to a lass from the fells? How she had been courted! not as the village lovers wooed with a sense of equality, at least, if not perhaps something more; but John Musgrave and young Lord Stanton had thought nobody in the world like her. And the young lord, poor fellow! had even broken his word for her, a sin which was but a glory the more to Lily in the eyes of the village critics—however bitterly it might have been condemned had his forsaken bride been a village maiden too. That this rivalry should have gone the length of blood, all for Lily's sweet looks, was a thing the middle-aged narrators shook their heads over with many a moral, "You see what the like of that comes to, lasses," they said. But the lasses only put their heads closer, and felt their hearts beat higher. To be fought for, to be died for! It was terrible, no doubt, but glorious. "Such things never happen nowadays" they said to themselves with a sigh.

And the news did not stop down below in

the plain, but mounted with the winds and the clouds, and reached lone places in the fells, where it raised a wilder excitement still—at least in one melancholy and solitary place.

CHAPTER XI.

AN AFTERNOON'S WORK.

“ You must not cry, Nello ; for one thing you are too big to cry ; or if you are not too big you are too old. You are eight—past ! and then the old gentleman downstairs is such a funny, funny old man, that he will eat us, Nello, if we make a noise.”

“ I don’t believe you,” said the little boy, whom England had much improved in strength. “ Old men do not eat children,” but he drew back a little, and stopped crying all the same.

“ We do not know no-ting about old men in England,” said Lilias—the *th* was still a difficulty to her ; and they both pronounced their *rs* in a way which was unfamiliar to English ears, though the letter exists and retains its natural sound in the north country. “ They are very very strange ; they sit in a chair all day, like the wild beasts. I go to the door and peep in. He has no cap on his

head like Don Pepé, but a bare place here, where the cap should be, and white hair. And he never moves nor speaks. Sometimes I think he will be cut out of wood ; and then all at once he rises up,—and me, I run away."

"Are you not afraid, Liliás ? I should be frightened," said the little boy, looking at her with large wondering eyes.

"That is because you are only eight, but I am twelve, and one is never frightened after twelve. I run away, and it makes me beat and thump here," Liliás put her hand to her heart to indicate the place, "and I like it."

"Yes," said the little brother, "when you run it makes that beat ; but I do not like it."

"Ah, you are a baby," said Liliás. She stood with her dark hair shaken back, and her eyes shining, an image of visionary daring. Nothing could be more unlike than these two children. The boy had all the features of his race, blue eyes, fair hair, with a touch of gold in it, a fair complexion, browned and reddened, indeed, with his long journey and the warm sun he had been used to, but already changing into the pink and white of English childhood. But there were none of the Musgrave features in Liliás. Her dark eyes, dancing with life

and energy, her warm colour, clear brown with an underlying rose tint, and a downy bloomy surface which softened every outline, and her crisp, yet shining dark hair, all belonged, not only to a different species, but to a different type of race. The Musgraves were robust and strong, but their strength was not of this buoyant kind. The cloud of anxiety which had been about her on her first appearance, that mystery of doubt with which a little human creature regards the strange and novel, in whatever form, not knowing if harm or good may be coming, had floated away, and Liliás had already taken back her natural character. She was at home in the house, every room of it, though she knew that she was hidden and thrust into corners, on account of "the old gentleman downstairs." This did not depress or trouble her, but felt like a joke, a mystification and masquerading such as is dear to childhood. She threw herself into the spirit of it with enjoyment, instead of brooding over it with melancholy consciousness, which was what Mary, forgetting childhood, as all grown people do, had feared.

The children were in the hall, which had now grown so familiar to them that they

could not understand how they had ever feared it. It was one of those exceptional days which occur now and then in the winter before the turn of the year. The whole world was full of sunshine. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the great green hill in front of them rose up in dazzling clearness of relief, like a visible way of ascent into heaven. There was not a breath stirring ; the trees, without a leaf upon them, printed themselves against the blue of the sky and the green of the hill, in minute perfection of branch and twig, like a photograph. The lake was as still and as blue as the sky—everything lay in the sunshine charmed and stilled, hanging motionless as it were between earth and heaven. The sense that it was mid-winter, the natural season of storms, seemed to have got into the air, which wondered over its own stillness, and into the skies, which excelled themselves in lightness and soft blueness, snatching this moment of delight with a fearful joy. Earth took that ecstasy as one who was well aware that she could not answer for the morrow. The great doorway of the hall stood wide open ; it was after mid-day, and the sun streamed in, having got to the west so much earlier than in summer. Lilias and her little brother,

children of the sun, were planted in the midst of it, enjoying it with unconscious exhilaration. Martuccia sat in the open doorway, basking in it, knitting ; a tranquil, almost motionless figure, with that faculty of repose which is no doubt awarded to nurses in compensation for the endless calls upon their activity. She had put a little tartan shawl—congenial garment—upon her fine shoulders, and, with her silver pins and glowing black hair all whitened by the sunshine, sat perfectly motionless except for the little rustle of her hands and click of her knitting-needles. It seemed immaterial whether it might be years or moments that the robust and comely watcher should hold that peaceful guardian place. She was paying no attention to the children, yet the lightest appeal, a querulous exclamation, a longer pause than usual, anything or nothing, would have brought her to her nurselings. It was the repose of the mother, who sees everything and feels everything, even when she does not see : and the additional security which her presence brought to them, though she sat apart and had nothing to do with their talk or their play, the strong support of the background which she made, it would be hard to tell in words. They had

been playing in the spacious place, all lighted and warmed through and through with sunshine. Miss Musgrave had not yet made her appearance ; either she had less time to spend in her favourite resort, or the fact that it had been appropriated to the children, as specially suitable in its size and separateness for their enjoyment, had made her relinquish its use. The great bay window in the recess gave back a reflected light from the shining of the lake, which added a colder tone to the prevailing brightness ; and in the old fireplace there burned a smouldering fire, half coals half wood. Every feature of the place had grown familiar to the two little things who were once so alarmed by its dark corners—so familiar that they could not understand how they had ever been afraid. The kind old spacious silent hall sheltered them with a large passive protection not unlike that of Martuccia herself.

But the afternoon languor had stolen upon the boy and girl, notwithstanding the brightness. They had come to a pause in their round of amusement, and though half-tired, were yet looking about with all their quick senses for some new delight. A little scuffle, a little quarrel and crying fit on Nello's part,

which had been put a stop to by the warning of Lilias already recorded, had left them free for a new start, but not with the old plays, which were worn out for the moment. They made an unconscious pause, and looked about them to find some novelty ; and both pounced upon one at the same moment with a burst of sudden and unlooked-for rapture. A great broad sheet of something white lay stretched out on Mary's table, in company with an open colour-box and brushes—a sight too tempting to be resisted by any child, especially after the exhaustion of a long day's play. It was wonderful that they had overlooked it so long. They caught sight of it simultaneously now, and the result was a sudden rush of eager curiosity. The boy got first to the goal ; perhaps he had been by a second of time the first to start. He grasped one side of the white sheet with his hot little hand, and climbing into the chair which stood before it, threw himself upon the new wonder. "It is Mary's," said Lilias, making a feeble effort to hold him back ; but her own curiosity was much stronger than her sense of duty to Mary, who allowed them to see everything and share everything she had. They both leant over the table breathless, the mysterious

whiteness crackling beneath their hands. It was a sheet of dazzling white vellum, ornamented with what they considered beautiful pictures, a puzzling, yet a tempting sight to the children. It was nothing less than a genealogical tree, their own pedigree, which Miss Musgrave, skilled in such works, was preparing for her father, ornamented with emblazoned coats of arms, some of them unfinished and inviting completion with a seductive force which made the children's hearts beat.

“What is it?” said Nello, in a tone of awe.

“I know,” said Liliás, confidently; “it is a copy. You have had no education, you don’t know what a copy is: but me, I have done them, though never any so pretty as this. Mary is a grown-up lady, old, not like us; it must be Mary’s copy. You should not touch it, you are too little.”

“I will try,” cried Nello, with his eyes upon the brushes. Already he had rubbed against something not yet dry, and had smudged the colour, to the horror of his sister. He had both his elbows upon it and the greater part of his small person.

“Oh, what have you done, you naughty

boy!" cried Lilias; "you cannot do it. Let me!"

"Yes, I will do it, I will do it!" cried Nello, seizing the crackling vellum and dashing at it with a brush full of colour. Lilias had to stand and look on, sorest of miseries, while her little brother performed badly what she felt she could have done well. There was a large shield in the centre, upon which the cherished "augmentation," the chief ornament of the Musgrave arms, was slightly drawn. Gules on a shield argent, it ought to have been—Nello made a blurred dash of bright blue, surrounded by a sea of red. "How it is pretty!" he cried, in his half-foreign speech, with a crow of triumph. Colour upon colour! and such colour! the sight would have driven Mr. Musgrave wild.

Lilias uttered a cry of horror; but the work of destruction was very captivating. Close to the vellum was the original draught of the genealogical tree, from which Mary had been copying. Lilias took possession of this, and carried it away to the table in the recess. She meant only to look at it, but the temptation was too much for her. At the bottom of the page an escutcheon void of all colour gradually caught her eye, a little white space

which might be made, she thought, to resemble the others with great advantage to the whole. That this came opposite to the name of John Musgrave was nothing to the child, but the sight of it wrought her by degrees into a sort of creative frenzy. She would not spoil it as Nello was doing, but to complete what was wanting could be no harm. Lilias took a brush and filled it with fine broad vermillion, a colour about which there could be no mistake, and painted the vacant shield a strong decided gules, safe from any accident. The outline was not very firm, and there were overflowings and runs of colour outside, but at all events the hue was undeniably. She was standing looking at it with a satisfied yet agitated mind, with the brush still in her hand, when her elbow was grasped by some one behind and a hand laid on her shoulder. In the start she gave, the child's arm made a nervous jerk of the brush over the paper, and ran a tremulous line of red over some half-dozen of the kindred names. "Mary!" she cried, with a sudden perception of wrong-doing. But Lilias did not weep or excuse herself. She got quite pale, with a red spot on each cheek, and stood, not even dropping the brush, looking up at her judge, with the

corners of her mouth suddenly turned downwards, and a gleam of awakened understanding in her alarmed eyes.

“Lilias! I thought I could trust you; what have you been doing?” cried Mary. “And Nello?” she added, looking round with dismay at the more important work. Nello had already been roused to that instinctive sense of harm which comes with the arrival of an aggrieved person. But he did not face his victim as Lilias did. He threw down his streaming pencil on the vellum, got down from his chair in the twinkling of an eye, and fled to take shelter with Martuccia, who, ever ready to defend, and yet unaware who was wrong, put an arm round him at once and faced Miss Musgrave with prompt defiance.

“Oh Mary!” cried Lilias, trembling, “Nello did not mean it. He is so little. Nello did not know.”

Mary was not so angelically sweet as to be indifferent to the damage done, but she had not the freedom of reproof which people exercise with children familiar to them. The little meddlers were still strangers. So she restrained herself and said nothing. She went to the parchment and began to sponge

off the still wet colour. Nello kept in his refuge regarding her from afar, ready to bolt behind Martuccia if she made any hostile advances and hide himself in his nurse's skirt. But Lilias followed Miss Musgrave closely as her shadow. She watched the sponging with the gravest anxious attention. She kept herself close against Mary's dress, touching it, and put herself in Mary's way, and interposed her wistful face, now quite pale and troubled, between the vellum and Mary's eyes. At last her aunt said, perhaps somewhat peevishly, "What do you want, child? You have done harm enough for one morning. Pray go out of my way."

"Have we done much harm?" said Lilias, with strained and anxious eyes.

"Yes; you have spoiled my week's work, you mischievous children," said Mary, melting a little. "I shall have to do it over again. I did not expect this, Lilias, from you."

"It was very, very bad of me," said the child, with perfect seriousness, her eyes slowly filling; "but Nello is such a little fellow—he did not know——"

"Then why did you do it, Lilias?"

The child looked up searchingly into her face. "I think it must have been the devil,"

she said, with portentous gravity, drawing a heavy sigh.

An impulse of laughter came to Miss Musgrave in the midst of her annoyance; but partly she restrained it for high moral reasons, and partly she was still too much annoyed to give way to laughter. “What do you know about—the devil?” she said. “I think it was your own little mischievous hands, and your curiosity.”

“Oh, I know a great deal about him. Mr. Pennithorne told us on Sunday; and Martuccia must be of the same religion as Mr. Pen, for she worships him too,” said Lilius, aware of the advantages of digression when things were so serious as they were now.

“Worships him, Lilius! You must not use such words.”

“They are always thinking of him, and they say he does everything. They are very, very afraid of him,” said Lilius seriously, “and so am I—he can do whatever he pleases; but I cannot think he is as strong as God.”

“And it was he who made you spoil my papers——?”

“Oh, Mary, not Nello—only me. Nello is such a little fellow, he did not mean it—he did not know what he was doing——”

"And did you?"

Lilias pressed very close against Mary's side. Her heart was beating loudly in her brave little bosom. Her sense of crime had not been lightened by the postponement of the punishment which must, she thought, be coming. But it was not in her to fly as her brother had done. She took a furtive hold of Mary's gown. No hope of any forgiveness was in her serious soul; yet to whom could she cling in earth and heaven but only to this inflictor of stern justice? She kept her eyes fixed on Mary's face, that she might see the fearful doom which was coming—that would always be a help in bearing it—and kept close to her, pressing against her. "*Aie-tu peur de moi? cache-toi dans mes bras*"—this was the child's impulse in her penitence and terror.

Mary forgot her vellum and its stains. She put her arm round the child, whose eyes opened a little wider thinking the judgment was coming, but who never shrank. "You will not do it again," she said. Lilias could not understand that it was over. She bent back a little the better to see Mary's face.

"Will you not punish me?" said the child. Between the fear and the wonder she was breathless. This was the most wonderful of all.

“No, dear—you will never do it again.”

“Nor Nello?” She put her arms round Mary’s arm, with that soft clinging which is irresistible in a child, and leant her head against her, and began to sob as if her heart would break. Then Nello, seeing the worst was over, came out from his shelter, venturing a few steps, then a few more. Forgiveness did not touch him, as punishment would have done. He came slowly, ready to turn and fly at any hostile demonstration. Nello had, as it were, an army at his back, his ships to take refuge in; but still it was with great caution that he made his advance. This little exhibition of character, however, soon melted in a more agreeable sentiment. As soon as the contingency was over, both the children, restored to a tremulous ease of mind, were seized with a common impulse of curiosity and interest. They forgot their own culpability in watching the obliteration of the damage they had done. Fortunately the discovery had been made in time, and the process of reparation, if not so exciting, was almost as interesting to them as the delicious frenzy of mischief in which they had wrought this harm. They pressed upon Mary as she worked, one at each side. When the last trace had disappeared

they gave a cry of joy. How clever Mary was! She could do everything. As for Nello, he was unmoved morally by the spectacle; it had been amusing all through, all but the moment of fear, which fortunately came to nothing. But Lilius never forgot this scene, and still less did Mary forget it, whose heart seemed to be learning a hundred sweet and subtle lessons, and to whom the child, even in her naughtiness, was like an angel, leading her to depths unsounded, nay, unthought of till now.

But when they had gone away, joyous as usual, to their "tea," which was a meal much scorned and wondered at by Martuccia, Mary went to the other table where lay the draught of the more important document upon which Lilius had been employed when she came into the hall. At this she smiled and shuddered, with a curious mixture of feelings. The little girl's mischief had taken a symbolical form. The blank shield which represented her mother was blurred and blood-red, and a stroke like blood ran across her father's name, and that of her father's father, from the little pool of red in the daubed shield. Lilius knew nothing of the lives from which her little life had sprung. It was accident, caprice, a child's fancy for

bright colour—yet it made Mary shudder even when she smiled.

Another incident, which she paid less attention to—indeed, did not think of at all—happened this same evening. She went to the door where Martuccia had been seated, her own favourite place, though now in great part given up to the children and their attendant, to look out upon the evening before she left the hall. When she had looked at the sky where the early wintry sunset was just over, leaving deep gorgeous tints of red and yellow upon a blue which was deepened by coming frost, Mary's look came back, carelessly enough, by the lower level of the long brown road. And it was with a momentary start that she found herself almost face to face with an unthought-of spectator, who was standing at the foot of the little slope, gazing intently up to the hall door. Mary was puzzled to see that though the woman's appearance was like that of many of the older women about, she did not know her; and at the same time she was equally perplexed by a consciousness that the face looking up at her thus eagerly was not that of a stranger. She could not associate it with any name, yet she seemed acquainted with the features, which were fine, and of an

unusual cast. The stranger's look was so intense that it struck Miss Musgrave like an audible petition. "Did you want anything?" she said with natural courtesy, making a step towards her. The woman turned sharp round on her heels with a hasty wave of her hand, and went hurriedly away towards the village without further reply. Who could she be? Mary asked herself lightly, and went in and forgot all about her. The people are independent in their ways, and not grateful for a casual address, in the north.

CHAPTER XII.

VISITORS.

“ My Lord Stanton, ma’am,” said Eastwood, with a certain expansion in the throat and fulness of voice, like that swell and gurgle which accompanies in a bird the fullest tide of song. Who has not heard that roll in the voice of the man who mouths a title like a succulent morsel ? A butler who loves his family, and who has the honour of announcing to them the visit of the greatest potentate about, is a happy man. And this was what Eastwood felt, as he uttered with a nightingale trill and swell of satisfaction this honoured name.

“ Lord—*whom*—? ” Mary rose to her feet so much startled that she did not know what she said.

“ Lord Stanton, ma’am,” the butler repeated. “ He asked if you would receive him. He said as he would not come in till I asked would you receive him, ma’am. I said you

was at home, and not engaged—but he said—”

“Lord Stanton!” The name seemed to hurt her, and a kind of dull fear rose in Mary’s mind. She knew, of course, who it was; the young successor of the man who, with intention or not, her brother had brought to his death. She knew well enough about Geoff. It had not been possible to hear the name at any time without interest, and in this way Mary had learned as much as strangers knew of the young lord. But what could he want here? A subdued panic seized her. She did not know what he could do, or if he could do anything; but that he should come merely as a friend did not seem probable. And how then had he come? She made a tremulous pause before she said, “Let him come in, Eastwood.” Eastwood thought Miss Musgrave was very properly impressed by the name of the young lord.

Geoff, for his part, waited outside, anxious as to how he was to be received, and very desirous in his boyish generosity to make a good impression. He had driven to Penninghame, a long way, and his horses, drawn up at the door, made a great show, when the children passed, stealing round the corner like little

intruders, but so much attracted by this sight, that they almost forgot their orders never to approach the hall door. Geoff himself was standing at some distance from his phaeton, waiting for his answer ; but even Lilius was old enough to know that to address commendatory remarks and friendly overtures to a horse or a dog is more easy and natural than to address a man. She said, "Oh, look, Nello, what lovely horses !" but only ventured to look up shyly into the friendly face of their owner, though she was not without an impression that he, too, was nice, and that he might give his friends a drive perhaps, with the lovely horses, a service which was not in the power of the animals themselves.

Geoff went up to them, holding out his hand. "You are the little Musgraves, I suppose ?" he said.

The boy hung back, as usual, hanging by Martuccia's skirts. "Yes," said Lilius, looking at him intently, as she always did ; and she added at once, "This is Nello," and did her best to put her small brother in the foreground, though he resisted, holding back and close to his protector.

"Is he shy, or is he frightened ? He need not be frightened of me," said Geoff, uncon-

sciously conscious of the facts between them which might have caused the child's timidity had he been old enough to know. "Nello is an odd name for a boy."

"Because you do not know where he came from," said Lilius quickly. "Nello is born in Florence. Here you will call him John. It is not so pretty. And me, I am born in France," she continued; "but we are English children. That does not make any difference."

"Don't you think so?" said simple Geoff. The little woman of twelve who thus fixed him with her great beautiful eyes, made him feel a boy in comparison with her mature childhood. She never relaxed in her watchful look. This was a habit Lilius had got, a habit born of helplessness, and of the sense of responsibility for her brother which was so strong in her mind. That intent, half-suspicious vigilance, as of one fully aware that he might mean harm, and quick to note the approach of danger, disconcerted Geoff, who meant nothing but good. "I know two little girls," he said, trying to be conciliatory, "who would like very much to know you."

"Ah!" said Lilius, melting a little, but shaking her head. "I have to take care of Nello; but if they would come here, and

would not mind Nello," she added, "perhaps I might play with them. I could ask—Mary—"

"Who is—Mary?"

"Oh! don't you know? If you do not know Mary we should not talk to you—we only ought to talk to friends—and besides, you have no right to call her Mary if you do not know her," said Liliias. She turned back to say this after she had gone a few steps away from him, following Nello, who, tired of the conversation, had gone on with his guardian to the Chase.

"That is quite true, and I beg your pardon," said Geoff; "it must be Miss Musgrave you mean."

Liliias nodded approving. She began to take an interest in this big boy. He was not strictly handsome, but had a bright, attractive countenance, and the child scarcely ever saw any male creature except Eastwood and Mr. Pen. "Have you come to see her?" she asked wistfully; "are you going to be a—friend?"

"Yes," said Geoff with a little emotion, "if she will let me. I am waiting to know. And tell me your name?" he added, with a slight tremor in his voice, for he was young and easily touched. "I will always be a friend to you."

“I am Lilias,” she said shyly, giving him her hand, for which he had held out his. And this was how Eastwood found them when he came bustling out to inform my lord that Miss Musgrave would see his lordship, if he would be good enough to step this way. Eastwood was much “struck” to see his lordship holding “little Miss’s” hand. It raised little Miss in the butler’s opinion. “If she had been a bit older, now!” he said to himself. Geoff was half reluctant to leave this little new acquaintance for the audience which he had come here expressly to ask. Mary was not likely to be so easily conciliated as little Lilias. And being a lord did not make him less shy. He waved his hand and took off his hat with a little sigh, as he followed Eastwood into the house; and Lilias, for her part, followed Nello slowly, with various thoughts in her small head. These it must be allowed were chiefly about the little girls who wanted to make friends with her—and of whom her lonely imagination made ecstatic pictures—and of the lovely horses who could spin her away over the broad country, if that big boy would let them. But Lilias did not think very much about the big boy himself.

Geoff went in blushing and tremulous to

Miss Musgrave's drawing-room. It was not a place so suitable to Mary as her favourite hall, being dark and somewhat low, not worthy either of her or of Penninghame Castle. She was standing, waiting to receive him, and after the bow with which he greeted her, Geoff did not know what to say to disclose his object. His object itself was vague, and he had no previous knowledge of her, as his cousin Mary had, to warrant him in addressing her. She offered him a chair, and she sat down opposite him ; and then there began an embarrassing pause which she would not, and which he did not seem able to, break. At last, faltering and stammering—

“ I came, Miss Musgrave,” he began, “ to say—I came to tell you—I came to ask—Circumstances,” cried Geoff, impatient of his own incapacity, “ seem to have made our families enemies. I don’t know why they should have done so.”

“ If the story is true, Lord Stanton, it is easy enough to see how they should have done so. My brother was concerned, they say, in your brother’s death.”

“ No one could prove that he did it, Miss Musgrave.”

“ He did not do it with intention, I am

sure," she said. "But so much is true. It was done, and how could we be friends after? We should have been angels—you to pardon the loss you had sustained, we to pardon the wrong we had done."

There was a gleam of agitation and pain in her eyes which might well have been taken for anger. The young man was discouraged.

"May I not say anything, then?" he said, wistfully. "My cousin Mary, Lady Stanton, whom you know, told me—but if you are set against us too, what need to say anything? I had hoped indeed, that you——"

"What did you hope about me? I should be glad of any approach. I grieved for your brother as if he had been mine. Oh more, I think, more! if it had been poor John who had died——"

"It would have been better," said the young man. "Yes, yes, Miss Musgrave, that is what I feel; Walter had the best of it. Your brother has been more than killed. But I came to say, that so far as we are concerned, there need not be any more misery. Let him come home, Miss Musgrave, let him come home! We none of us can tell now how Walter died."

Mary was moved beyond the power of

words. She got up hastily and took his hand, and pressed it between her own.

“Thank you, I shall always thank you!” she cried, “whether he comes home or not. Oh, my dear boy, who are you that come with mercy on your lips? You are not like the rest of us!”

Mary was thinking of others, more near, whose wrongs were not as the Stantons’, but whom nothing could induce to forgive.

“I am my mother’s son,” said Geoff, his eyes brighter than usual, with a smile lighting up the moisture in them. What Mary said seemed a tribute to his mother, and this made him glad. “She does not know, but she would say so. Let him come home. I heard of the children, and that your brother——”

“Yes,” said Miss Musgrave, “from Mary. She told you. She always took an interest in him. Do you know,” she added in a low voice of horror, “that there is a verdict against him, a coroner’s verdict of murder?”

She shuddered at the word as she said it, and so did he.

“But not a just one. No jury would say it was—that: not now——”

“Heaven knows what a jury would say. It is all half forgotten now; and as for the

dates, and all those trifles that tell in a trial, who knows anything about them ? Even I—could I swear to the hour my brother went out that morning ? I could once, and did, and it is all written down. But I don't seem sure of anything now, not that there ever was a Walter Stanton, or that I had a brother John ; and I am one of the interested ; the people who were not specially interested, do you think they would have better memories ? Ah, no ; and he fled ; God help him ! I don't know why he did it. That was against him ; though I don't think any one believes that John Musgrave did *that*, now."

"I am sure they do not, and that is why I came. Let him come home, Miss Musgrave. He would not have been convicted had he been tried. I have been reading it all up, and I have taken advice. He would be cleared. And if there is risk in it, we would all stand by him. I would stand by him," said the young man with a generous flush of resolution, "so much as I am worth. I want you to tell him so. Tell him to come home."

Mary shook her head. How long she had been calm about this terrible domestic tragedy, and how it all rose upon her now ! She got

up, in her agitation, and walked about the room.

“How could he risk it—how could he risk it—with that sentence against him ?” she said ; then after a while she came back to her seat, and looked at Geoff piteously with a heartrending look in her eyes. She was past crying, which would have relieved her. “That is not all,” she said in a low voice. “Alas, alas ! if all was well, and he might come home when he pleased, it would matter less. I know nothing about him, Lord Stanton. I don’t know my brother any longer, nor where he is, nor how he is living now.”

“But his children have just come to you !”

“Yes, out of the unknown. No one knows anything about him ; and suddenly they came out of the darkness, as I tell you. That is where he is : out in the world, in the dark, in the unknown——”

“There are ways of penetrating the unknown,” said Geoff, cheerfully. “There are advertisements ; everybody sees the *Times* now-a-days. It goes all over the world. Wherever there is an Englishman he sees it somehow. Let us advertise.”

“He would not see it.”

“ Then a detective — let us send some one — ”

“ Oh no, no, no,—not that. I could not bear that. We must let him alone till he comes of his own accord. Let well alone,” said Mary, in her panic. She scarcely knew what she said.

“ Well! do you call it well, Miss Musgrave, that your brother should be away from his home, from everything he loves—his country lost to him, his position, all his friends ? ”

“ He has not been separated from everything he loves ; he had wife and children ; does a man care for anything else ? What was this old house to him, and—us—in comparison ? His wife is dead—that was God’s doing ; and his children have come home—that is his own choice. I say, let well alone, Lord Stanton ; when he wishes it he will—come—back ; but not to those he loves,” Mary said in a low tone.

Geoff could not fathom her meaning, it was beyond him. The accusation under which John Musgrave lay was bad enough. It was cowardly of him (he thought) to fly and leave this stigma, uncontested, upon his own name ; but that there should be any further mystery did not seem possible to the

young man. Perhaps there was something wrong with the family, some incipient insanity, monomania, eccentricity. He could not understand it. But at least he had shown his goodwill, if no more.

“I must not dictate to you, Miss Musgrave,” he said; “you know best,” and he rose to go away, but stood hesitating, reluctant to consent to the failure of his generous mission. “If I can be of any use, at any time,” he added, blushing and faltering; “not that I can do much; but if you should—change your mind—if you should—think——”

She took his hand once more in both of hers.

“I shall always think that you have the kindest and most generous heart: and are a friend—a true friend—to John, and everybody in trouble.”

“I hope so,” said the youth, fervently; “but that is nothing;—to you, Miss Musgrave, if I can ever be of any use.”

“I will ask you, if it ever can be,” she said.
“I will not forget.”

He kept hold of her hands when she loosed them, and with a confused laugh and change of tone, asked “About the children? I met

them just now. Might I bring my little cousins, Lady Stanton's children, to see them? They want to meet."

"Sir Henry would not like it, though she might. Sir Henry is not like you."

"I know; he is *plus royalist que le roi*. But the children would. And they don't deny me anything," said Geoff, with a little laugh.

He scarcely knew why this was—but it was so; nothing was denied to him; he was the *enfant gâté* of Elfdale. Miss Musgrave was not, however, quite so complacent. She gave an assent which was cold and unwilling, and which quenched Geoff's genial enthusiasm. He went back to his phaeton quite subdued and silent. "But I will see that little thing again," he said to himself.

In the meantime, while this conversation had been going on, Lilius had wandered forth alone into the Chase. Martuccia had gone before with Nello, while Lilius talked to the young man; and now the child followed dreamily, as she was in the habit of doing, her eyes abstracted, her whole being rapt in a separate consciousness, which surrounded her like an atmosphere of her own. She knew vaguely that the little brother and his

nurse were in front of her ; but the watchfulness of Lilias had relaxed, and she was not thinking of Nello. He was safe ; here was no one who could interfere with him. She had taken up a branch of a tree which lay in her path and had caught her childish fancy, and with this she went on, using it like a pilgrim's staff, and saying a kind of low chant, without words, to herself, to which the rough staff was made to keep time. What was she thinking of ? everything, nothing ; thought indeed was not necessary to the fresh soul in that subdued elation and speechless gladness. There was a vague sense in her mind of the brisk air, the sunshine, the blue sky, the floating clouds, all in one ; but had the clouds been low upon the trees, and the air all damp instead of all exhilaration, it would have made little difference to Lilias. Her spring of unconscious blessedness was within herself. Her song was not music nor her movements harmony in any way that could be accounted for by rule ; and indeed the low succession of sounds which came from her lips unawares, and to which her little steps and the stroke of the rough stick kept time, was more inartificial than even the twittering of the birds. A small, passive,

embodied happiness went roaming along the rough, woodland path, with soft-glowing abstracted eyes that saw everything, yet nothing ; with a little abstracted soul, all freshness and gladness, that took note of everything, yet nothing ; a little pilgrim among life's mysteries and wonders, herself the greatest wonder of all, throbbing with a soft consciousness, yet knowing nothing. Thus she went pacing on under the bare trees, and murmured her inarticulate chant, and kept time to it, a poet in being, though not in thought. Not far off the lake splashed softly upon the stones of the beach, and that north country air, which is vocal as the winds of the south, sounded a whole mystery of tones and semi-tones, deep through the fir-trees, shrill through the beeches, low and soft over the copse ; and the brook, half-hidden in the overgreenness of the grass, added its tinkle ; all surrounding the little figure which gave the central point of conscious intelligence to the landscape ; but were all quite unnecessary to Lilius marching along in her dream to her own music, a something higher than they, a thing full of other and deeper suggestions, the wonder of the world.

Lilius woke up, however, out of this other

world, all in a moment, into the conscious existence of a lively, brave, fancifully-timid child, when she found herself suddenly confronted by a stranger, who did not pass on as strangers usually did, making a mere momentary jar and pause in the visionary atmosphere, but who made a decided pause, and stopped her. A little thrill of fear sprang up in the child's breast, and she would have hurried on, or even run away, but for the pride of honour and courage in her little venturesome spirit which made it impossible to fly. It was an old woman who stood in her path, tall but stooping, dressed in a large grey cloak, the hood of which covered her white thick muslin cap. She was a woman considerably over sixty, with handsome features and brilliant dark eyes, and, notwithstanding her stooping figure, full of vigour and power. She carried a basket on her arm under her cloak, and had a stick in her hand, and at her neck a red handkerchief just showed, which would have replaced the hood on her cap had it been less cold. Just so the fairy in the fairy-tales appears to the little maiden in the wood, the Cinderella by the kitchen-fire. Lilius was not at all sure that it was not that poetical old woman who looked

at her with those shining eyes. She made a brief, instantaneous resolution to draw water for her, or pick up sticks, or do anything she might require.

“Little Miss, you belong to the Castle, don’t you now? and where may you come from?” was what the problematical fairy said, with a something wet and gleaming in her eyes such as never obscures the sight of fairies. Lilius was overawed by the tone of eager meaning, though she did not understand it, in the questioning voice, yet might not have answered but for that feeling that it was unsafe, as much experience had proved, to be less than obsequiously civil to old women with wands in their hands who could make (if you were so naughty as to give a rude answer) toads and frogs drop from your mouth.

“Yes,” she said, with a little tremble in her clear, childish voice. “We come a very, very long way—over the mountains, and then over the sea.”

“Do you know the name of the place you came from, little Miss?”

“Oh yes, I know it very well, we were so often there. It was Bagni di Lucca. It was a very, very long way. Nello——”

But the child paused. Why introduce Nello, who was not visible, to the knowledge of this uncertain person? who, if she was a fairy, might be a wicked one, or, if she was a woman, might be unkind, for anything Lilias knew. She stopped short nervously, and it was evident that the old woman had not taken any notice of the name.

“Little Miss, your mamma would be sorry to send you away?”

“It was papa,” said the little girl, with wondering eyes. “Poor mamma;—I was quite little when—it was when Nello was a little, little small baby. Now we have nobody but papa.”

The old woman staggered and almost fell, but supported herself by her stick for a moment, while Lilias uttered a scream of terror; then sat down with a groan upon a fallen tree. “It’s nothing new, nothing new,” she said to herself; “I felt it long ago,” and covered her face with her hands, with once more a heavy groan. Little Lilias did not know what to do. She had screamed when the old woman staggered, not knowing what was going to happen; but what was she to do now, alone with this strange companion, seated there on the fallen trunk and rocking herself to and fro,

with her face hidden in her hands ? It did not occur to the child to associate this sudden trouble with the information she had herself given. What could this stranger have to do with her ? And poor mamma had receded far into the background of Liliás's memory, not even now an occasion of tears. She did not, however, need to go into this reasoning, but simply supposed that the poor old fairy was ill, or that something had happened to her, and never at all connected effect and cause. She stood for a little time irresolute, then, overcoming her own fears, went up to the sufferer and stroked her compassionately on the shoulder. "Are you ill, old woman ?" she said.

"Oh, call me Granny—call me Granny, my pretty dear !"

Liliás was more puzzled than ever ; but she made up her mind that she would do whatever was asked of her by this disguised personage, who might turn into—anything, in a moment. "Yes, Granny," she said, trembling, and still stroking the old woman's shoulder. "I hope you are not ill."

The answer she made to this was suddenly to clasp her arms round Liliás, who could scarcely suppress a cry of horror. What a

strange—what a very strange old woman! Fortunately Lilias, brought up in a country where servants are friends, had no feeling of repulsion from the embrace. She was a little frightened, and did not understand it—that was all. The old woman's breast heaved with great sobs; there could be no doubt that she was very deeply, strongly moved. She was “very sorry about something,” according to Lilias’ simple explanation. She clasped the child close, and kissed her with a tearful face, which left traces of its weeping upon the fresh cheeks. The little girl wiped them off, wondering. How could she tell why this was? Perhaps it was only to try her if she was the kind of little girl who was uncivil, or not; but she did not indeed try to account for it. It was not very pleasant, but she put up with it, partly in fear, partly in sympathy, partly because, as we have said, she had no horror of the too near approach of a poor old woman, as an English-bred child might have had. Poor old creature, how sorry she was about something! though Lilias could not imagine what it was.

“God bless you, honeysweet,” said the old woman. “You’ve got her dear face, my jewel. It isn’t that I didn’t know it years and years

ago. I was told it in my sleep ; I read it in the clouds and on the water. Oh, if you think I wasn't warned ! But you've got her bonnie face. You'll be a beauty, a darling beauty, like the rest of us. And look you here, little Miss, my jewel. If you see me when the gentry's with you you'll take no notice ; but if you see me by myself you'll give me a kiss and call me Granny. That's fixed between us, honey, and you won't forget ? Call me Granny again, to give me a little comfort, my pretty dear."

"Yes, Granny," said the child, trembling. The old woman kissed her again, drying her tears.

"God bless you, and God bless you !" she said. "You can't be none the worse of your old Granny's blessing. And mind, if you're with the gentlefolks you'll take no notice. Oh, my honeysweet, my darling child !"

Lilias looked after her with wondering, disturbed eyes. What a strange old woman she was ! How strange that she should behave so ! and yet Lilias did not attempt to inquire why. Grown-up people in her experience did a great many strange things. It was of no use trying to fathom what they meant, and this strange old person was only a little more

strange than the rest, and startling to the calm little being who had grown in the midst of family troubles and mysteries without divining any of them. Strangely enough, the old woman felt equally independent of any necessity for explanation. It seemed so clear in her mind that everybody must know the past and understand her claims, whatever they were. She had no more idea of the tranquillity of innocent ignorance in Liliás's mind than the little girl had of the mysteries of her experience. Liliás watched her going away through the high columns of the trees with great wonder yet respect, and it was not till she had disappeared that the little girl went on after Nello. Nello would have been frightened by that curious apparition. He would have cried perhaps, and struggled, and would not have said *Granny*. Perhaps he would have angered her. What a good thing that Nello had not been here !

PART IV.

CHAPTER XIII

FAMILY CARES.

LILIAS did not say much about the adventure in the wood ; nothing at all indeed to Mary or any one in authority ; nor did it dwell in her mind as a thing of much importance. The kind of things that strike a child's mind as wonderful are not always those which would most impress an older person. There were many things at Penninghame very curious and strange to the little girl. The big chimneys of the old house, for instance, the sun-dial in the old garden, and on a lower level the way in which Cook's cap kept on, which seemed to Lilias miraculous, no means of securing it being visible. She pondered much on these things, trying to arrive at feasible theories in respect to them, but there was no theory required about the other very natural incident. That

an old woman should meet her in the woods, and kiss her, and ask to be called granny, and cry over her,—there was nothing wonderful in that; and indeed if, as she already suspected, it was no old woman at all, but a fairy, such as those in the story-books, who would probably appear again and set her tasks to do, much more difficult than calling her granny, and end by transforming herself into a beautiful lady—this would still remain quite comprehensible, not by any means unparalleled in the experience of one who had already mastered a great deal of literature treating of such subjects. She was interested but not surprised, for was it not always to a child or children by themselves in a wood that fairies did speak? She told Nello about the meeting, who was not surprised any more than she was; for though he was not very fond of reading himself, he had shared all his sister's, having had true histories of fairies read to him almost ever since he could recollect anything. He made some cynical remarks prompted by his manhood, but it was like much manly cynicism, only from the lips, no deeper. “I thought fairies were all dead,” he said.

“Oh, Nello; when you know they are spirits and never die! they are hundreds and

hundreds of years older than we are, but they never die ; and it is always children that see them. I thought she would tell us to do something——”

“I would not do something,” said Nello ; “I would say, ‘Old woman, do it yourself.’”

“And do you know what would happen then ?” said Lilias, severely ; “whenever you opened your mouth, a toad or a frog would drop out of it.”

“I should not mind ; how funny it would be ! how the people would be surprised.”

“They would be frightened—fancy ! every word you said ! till all round there would be things creeping and creeping and crawling all over you ; slimy cold things that would make people shiver and shriek. Oh !” said Lilias, recoiling and putting up her hands, as if to put him away ; “the frogs ! squatting and jumping all over the floor.”

At this lively realization of his problematical punishment, Nello himself grew pale, and nervously looked about him. “I would kill her !” he cried, furiously ; “what right would she have to do that to me ?”

“Because you did not obey her, Nello.”

“And why should I obey her ?” cried the boy ; “she is not papa, or Martuccia—or Mary.”

“But we must always do what the fairies tell us,” said Lilias ; “not perhaps because they have a right—for certainly it is different with papa—but because they would hurt us if we didn’t ; and then if you are good and pick up the sticks, or draw the water from the well, then she gives you such beautiful presents. Oh ! I will do whatever she tells *me*.”

“What kind of presents, Lily ? I want a little horse to ride—there are a great many things that I want. Do fairies give you what you want, or only what they like ?”

This was a puzzling question ; and on the spur of the moment Lilias did not feel able to answer such a difficulty. “If you do it for the presents, not because they ask you, they will not give you anything,” she said ; “that would be all wrong if you did it for the presents.”

“But you said——”

“Oh, Nello ; you are too little, you don’t understand,” cried the elder sister, like many another perplexed authority ; “when you are older you will know what I mean. I can tell you things, but I can’t make you understand.”

“What is it he cannot understand ?” said Mary, coming suddenly upon their confidential talk. The two children came apart hastily,

and Lilias, who had two red spots of excitement on her cheeks, looked up startled, with lips apart. Nello laughed with a sense of mischief. He was fond of his sister, but to get her into trouble had a certain flavour of fun in it, not disagreeable to him.

“It is about the fairies,” he cried, volubly. “She says you should do what they tell you. She says they give you beautiful presents. She says, she——”

“Oh, about the fairies!” said Mary, calmly, with a smile, going on without any more notice. Lilias was very angry with her brother, but what was the use? And she was frightened lest she should be made to look ridiculous, a danger which is always present to the sensitive mind of a child. “I will never, never talk to you again,” she said to him under her breath; but Nello knew she would talk to him again as soon as her mind wanted disburdening, and was not afraid.

And of how many active thoughts, and wonderful musings, and lively continued motion of two small minds and bodies, the old hall was witness in those quiet days! Mary coming and going, and the solid figure of Martuccia in the sunshine, these two older and more important persons were as shadows

in comparison with that ceaseless flow of existence. The amount of living in the whole house beside, was not half equal to that which went on in the motherly calm of the old hall, which held these two small things like specks in its tranquil embrace, where so much had come to pass. There was always something going on there. Such lively counterfeiting of the older life, such deeply-laid plans, dispersed in a moment by sudden changes of purpose, such profound gravity upset by the merest chance interruption, such perpetual busyness without thought of rest. Their days went on thus without hindrance or interruption, nothing being required of them except to be amused and healthy, and competent to occupy and please themselves. Had they been dull children, or subject to the precocious *ennui* which is sometimes to be seen even in a nursery, no doubt measures would have been taken to bring about a better state of affairs ; but as they were always busy, always gay, they were left completely to their own devices, protected, sheltered, and ignored, enjoying the freedom of a much earlier age, a freedom from all teaching and interference, such as seldom overpasses the first five years of human life. Mary had her whole *métier* to learn in respect

to the children, and there were many agitating circumstances which pre-occupied her mind and kept her from realizing the more simple necessities of the matter. It had cost her so much to establish them there, and the tacit victory over fate, unnatural prejudice, and all the bondage of family troubles, had been so great, that the trembling satisfaction of having gained it blunted her perceptions of further necessity. It was from a humble quarter that enlightenment first came to her. Her teacher was Miss Brown, her maid, who had early melted to the children, and who by this time was their devoted vassal, and especially the admiring slave of Nello, whom, with determined English propriety, she called Master John. Miss Brown's affection was not unalloyed by other sentiments. Her love for the children indeed was intensified by strenuous disapproval of their other guardians—Martuccia with her foreign fashions, and Miss Musgrave, who was ignorant as a baby herself, and knew nothing about "children's ways." Between these two incapable persons her life became a burden to Miss Brown. "I can't get my night's rest for thinking of it," she said to Cook, who like herself had the interest of many years' service in "the family." "I would up and speak," said

Cook. “ Speak ! ” cried Miss Brown, “ I’m always speaking ; but what can a body do, when folks won’t understand ? ” It is the lament of the superior intelligence over all the world. However, Miss Brown finally made up her mind to speak, and did so, pointing out that Master John was eight, though he looked no more than six, and that “ schooling ” was indispensable. The suggestion when once made could not be disputed, and it raised a great perturbation in Mary’s breast. She sent away the maid with some haste and impatience, but she could not send away the thought.

And the more Mary thought upon this matter, the more serious it grew ; she brooded over it till her head ached ; and she was glad beyond measure to see Mr. Pennithorne coming slowly along the road. She could see him almost from the moment his spare figure turned the corner from the village ; the outline and movement of him was so familiar to her, as he grew upon the quiet distance drawing nearer and nearer. It was seldom that she anticipated his approach with so much satisfaction. Not that Mr. Pennithorne, good man, was likely to invent an outlet out of a difficulty, but he was the only person to whom she could talk with absolute freedom upon this subject, and to

put it forth in audible words, and set it thus in order to her own ear and mind, was always an advantage. How like Mr. Pen it was to come on so quietly step after step, while she was waiting impatient for him ! not a step quicker than usual, no swing of more rapid motion in the droop of his long coat. Why should he quicken his steps ? She laughed to herself at her own childish impatience. Ought he not to have divined that she wanted him urgently after all these years ? Mary had gone into the hall, the children being absent on their daily walk. They were so much in her thoughts that she was glad to get them out of her sight for the moment and thus relieve the air which rustled and whispered with them. She went out to meet the slowly approaching counsellor. It was summer by this time, and all was green and fair, if still somewhat cold in its greenness to a southern eye. The sunshine was blazing over the lake, just approaching noon, and the sky was keenly blue, so clear that the pleasure of it was almost a pain, where the green shoulder of the hill stood against it in high relief. It was seldom that Mary was at leisure so early, and very seldom that in the morning when both were busy she should have a visit from Mr. Pen. As she made a few steps down

the slope that led from the hall door, to meet him, the sunshine caught her full, streaming from behind the corner of the house. It caught in her hair, and shone in it, showing its unimpaired gloss and brightness. Mr. Pennithorne was dazzled by it as he came up, and asked himself if she was superior to time as to most things else, and, after all those years, was young as well as lovely still ?

“I am very glad to see you,” she said, holding out her hand. “I just wanted you ; it is some good fairy that has sent you so early to-day.”

His face brightened up with an answering gleam ; or was it only the sun that had got hold of him too, and woke reflections in his middle-aged eyes ? “I am very happy to have come when you wanted me,” he said, his eyelids growing moist with pleasure. He went in to the hall, where all was comparative dusk after that brilliant shining of the noon, and sat down on the stool which was Martuccia’s usual place. “ Whatever you want, Miss Mary, here I am,” her faithful servant said.

Then she unfolded to him her difficulty : “ Their education ! ” what was she to do ? what could be done ? Mr. Pen sat by her very sympathetically and heard everything.

He was not very clever about advising, seeing that it was generally from her that he took advice, instead of giving it. But he listened, and did not see his way out of it, which of itself was a comfort to Mary. If he had been clever, and had struck out a new idea at once, it is doubtful whether she would have liked it half so well. She went into the whole question, and eased her mind at least. What was she to do? Mr. Pen shook his head. He was quite ready to take Nello, and teach him all he remembered, after a life spent in rural forgetfulness, of Latin and Greek; but Lilias! and Lilias was the most urgent as being the eldest. There was no school within reach, and a governess, as Mr. Pen suggested with a little trembling—a governess! where could Mary put her,—what could she do with her? It seemed hopeless to think of that.

“I don’t know what you will think of what I am going to say—but there is Randolph, Miss Mary; he is a family man himself. I suppose—of course—he knows about the children?”

“Randolph!” said Mary, faltering; “Mr. Pen, you know what Randolph is as well as I do.”

“People change,” said Mr. Pen, evasively.

“It is not for me to say anything ; but perhaps—he ought to know.”

“He has never taken any interest in the house ; he has never cared to be—one of us,” said Mary. “Perhaps because he was brought up away from us. You know all about it. When he came back—when he was with you and poor John—— You know him as well as I do,” she concluded abruptly. “I don’t see what help we could have from him.”

“He is a family man himself,” said the Vicar. “When children come they bring new feelings ; they open the heart. He was not like you—or poor John ; but he was like a great many people in this world ; he would not be unkind. You write to him sometimes ?”

“Once or twice a year. He writes to ask how my father is—I often wonder why. He has only been here once since—since it all happened. He would not have it known that he was one of the family which was so much talked about—that he was the brother of——” Mary stopped with a flash of indignation in her eyes. “He has separated himself altogether from us, as you know; but he asks from time to time how my father is, though I scarcely know why.”

“And you have told him, I suppose, about the children?”

“No, Mr. Pen; he turned his back upon poor John from the beginning. Why should I tell him? what has he to do with it? We have left our subject altogether talking of Randolph, who is quite apart from it. Let us go back to our sheep—our lambs in this case. What is to be done with them?”

“I will do what I can for them, as I did for their father,” said the Vicar. “I was thinking that little Johnny must very soon—and Mary might as well—They can come to me for an hour or two every day; that would be something. But I think Randolph should be told. I think Randolph ought to know. He might be thinking, he might be calculating——”

“What, Mr. Pen?” Mary confronted him with head erect and flashing eyes. “Why should he think or calculate about us? He has separated himself from the family. John’s children are nothing to him.”

It was not often that Mr. Pen was worldly wise; but he had an inspiration this time. He shook his head slowly. “It is just that; John’s children might make all the difference to him,” he said.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR VISITOR.

MR. PENNITHORNE went home thoughtful, and Miss Musgrave remained behind, if not exactly turned in a new direction, yet confused and excited in her mental being by the introduction of a new element. Randolph Musgrave, though her brother, was less known to Mary than he was to the tutor who had travelled and lived with him in the interval during which he had made his nearest approach to friendship with his own family. He had been brought up by an uncle on the mother's side who did not love the Musgraves, and had succeeded to the family living belonging to that race, and lived now, as he had been brought up, in an atmosphere quite different from that which belonged to his nominal home in the north. Except now and then, in a holiday visit, Randolph had scarcely spent any portion of his life at Penninghame, except the short period just before, and for a little time

after, his university career, when he shared with his brother John the special instructions of Mr. Pennithorne. The two young men had worked together then, or made believe to work, and they had travelled together; but being of very different dispositions, and brought up in ways curiously unlike, they had not been made into cordial friends by this period of semi-artificial union. Randolph had been trained to entertain but a small opinion of everything at Penninghame, and when Penninghame became public property, and John and all his affairs and peculiarities were discussed in the newspapers, the younger son did something very like the Scriptural injunction—shaking the dust from off his feet as he departed. He went away after some painful scenes with his father. It was not the old Squire's fault that his eldest son had become in the eyes of the world a criminal; but Randolph was as bitter at the ignominy brought upon his name as if it had been a family contrivance to annoy and distress him, and had gone away vowing that never again would he have anything to do with his paternal home. There had been a long gap in their relations after that, but at his marriage there had been a kind of reconciliation, enough

to give a decorous aspect to his relations with his "people." He had brought his bride to his father's house, and since then he had written, as Mary said, now and then, once or twice in the year, to inquire after his father's health. This was not much, but it saved appearances, and prevented the open scandal of a family quarrel. But Mary, who replied punctilioiusly to these questions, did not see the need of making a further intimation to him of anything that affected the family. What had he to do with John's children? She would no more have thought of informing him of any private event in her own history, or of looking to him for sympathy, than she would have stopped a beggar on the road to communicate her good or evil fortune. But the very name of Randolph suggested new complications. She was glad to escape from the whole matter and listen to the account of the lessons when Lilius and Nello came back from one of their earliest experiences of the instruction given by Mr. Pennithorne. The children came in breathless with the story they had to tell. "Then he made me read out of all the books," said Lilius, her dark eyes shining; "but Nello, because he was so little, one book was enough for him."

"But it was not a girl's book," said Nello; "it was only for Johnnie and me."

"And I looked in it," said his sister; "it is all mixed with Italian—such funny Italian: instead of *padre* it was put *payter*—Mr. Pen called it so. But it would not do for Nello, when we go back, to say his Italian like that. Even Martuccia would laugh, and Martuccia is not educated."

"It was Latin," said Nello; "Mr. Pen said so. He said girls didn't want Latin. Girls learn to dance and sing; but I—and Johnnie—"

"Will Mr. Pen teach me to dance—and sing, Mary?" said Lilius, with a grave face.

"And me, I wrote a copy," said Nello, indifferent to the interruption; "look!" and he held up fingers covered with ink. "You cannot read it yet, but you will soon be able to read it, Mr. Pen says. And then I will write you a letter, Mary."

"It would be better to write letters to some one far off," said Lilius, half scornful of his want of information. "You can *talk* to Mary, Nello. It is to far-off people that one makes letters."

"We have nobody that is far off," said Nello, shaking his head with the sudden

consciousness of a want not hitherto realized.
“Then I need not write copies any more.”

“Your father is far off, Nello,” said Mary ; “your poor papa, who never hears any news of you. Some time I hope you will be able to write to him, and ask him to come home.”

“Oh,” cried Lilius, “you need not be sorry about that, Mary. He will come home. Some day, in a moment when you are thinking of nothing, there will be a step on the stair, and Martuccia will give a shriek ; and it will be as if the sun came shining out, and it will be papa ! He is always like that—but you never know when he will come.”

Mary’s eyes filled in spite of herself. What long, long years it was that she had thought but little of John ! and yet there suddenly seemed to come before her a vision of his arrival from school or from college, all smiles and brightness, making the old roof ring with his shout of pleasure. Was it possible that this would happen over again—that he would come in a moment, as his little daughter said ? But Lilius did not know all the difficulties, nor the one great obstacle that stood in John’s way, and which perhaps he might never get over. She forgot herself in these thoughts,

and did not perceive that Lilias was gazing wistfully at her, endeavouring with all her childish might to penetrate her mind and know the occasion of these tears. Mary was recalled to herself by feeling the child's arm steal round her, and the soft touch of a little hand and handkerchief upon her wet eyes. "You are crying," said Lilias. "Mary, is it for papa?—why should you cry for papa?"

"My darling, we don't know where he is, nor anything about him—"

"That does not matter," said Lilias, winking rapidly to throw off the sympathetic tears which had gathered in her own eyes; "he is always like that. We never knew where he was; but just when he could, just when it was possible, he came home. We never could tell when it would be—it might be any day. Some time when we are forgetting and not expecting him. Ah——!" cried the child, with a ring of wonder in the sudden exclamation. The hall-door was open as usual, and on the road was a distant figure just visible which drew from Lilias this sudden cry. She ran to the door, clutching her brother—"Come, Nello, Nello!" and rushed forth. Mary sat still, thinking her heart had stopped in her breast—or was it not rather

suffocating her by the wildness of its beating ? She sat immovable, watching the little pair at the door. Could it be that John had come home ? John ! he who would be the most welcome yet the most impossible of visitors ; he who had a right to everything, yet dared not be seen in the old house. She sat and trembled, not daring to look out, already planning what she could do, what was to be done.

But the children stopped short at the door. Lilias, with the wind in her skirts and her ribbons, half-flying, stopped ; and Nello stopped, who went by her impulse, not by his own. They paused : they stood for a moment gazing ; then they turned back sadly.

“ Oh no, no ! ” said Lilias. “ No, Mary ! no. It is a little, something like—a very little ; it is the walking, and the shape of him. But no, no, it is not papa ! ”

“ Papa ! ” said Nello, “ was that why you looked ? I knew better. Papa is all that much more tall. Why are you crying, Lily ? There is nothing that makes cry.”

“ I am disappointed,” said the little girl, who had seated herself suddenly on the floor and wept. It was a sudden sharp shower, but it was soon over ; she sprang up drying her

eyes. "But it will be for to-morrow!" she cried.

Mary sat behind and looked on. She did not think again of the chance resemblance Lilias had seen, but only of the children themselves, with whom her heart was tuning itself more and more in sympathy. She had become a mother late and suddenly, without any gradual growth of feeling—leaping into it, as it were; and every response her mind made to the children was a new wonder to her. She looked at them, or rather at Lilias, who was always the leader in her rapid changes of sentiment, with a half-amused adoration. The crying and the smiles went to her heart as nothing else had ever done; and even Nello's calm, the steadier going of the slower, less developed intelligence, which was so often carried along in the rush without any conscious intention, and which was so ready to take the part of the wise and say "I knew it," moved Mary with that mixture of pleased spectatorship and profound personal feeling which makes the enthusiasm of parents. Nello's slowness might have seemed want of feeling in another child, and Lilias's impetuosity a giddy haste and heedlessness; but all impartiality was driven from her mind by the

sense that the children were her own. And she sat in a pleased abstraction yet lively readiness, following the little current of this swiftly-flowing softly-babbling childhood which was so fair and pleasant to her eyes. The two set up an argument between themselves as she sat looking on. It was about some minute point in the day's work which was so novel and unaccustomed ; but trivial as it was Mary listened with a soft glow of light in her eyes. The finest drama in the world could not have taken her out of herself like the two little actors, playing their sincerest and most real copy of life before her. They were so much in earnest, and to her it was such exquisite play and delicate, delightful fooling ! And until the light in the open doorway was suddenly darkened by some one appearing, a figure which made her heart jump, she thought no more of the passer-by on the road who had roused the children. Her heart jumped, and then she followed her heart by rising suddenly to her feet, while the children stopped in their argument, rushed together for mutual support, and stood shyly with their heads together, the arrested talk still hovering about their lips. Seen thus against the light the visitor was undecipher-

able to Mary. She saw him, nothing but a black shadow, towards which she went quietly and said—

“I beg your pardon, this is a private door,” with a polite defence of her own sanctuary.

“I came to look for—my sister,” said the voice, which was one which woke agitating memories in her. “I am a—stranger. I came—. Ah! it is Mary after all.”

“Randolph!” she cried, with a gasp in her throat.

A thrill of terror, almost superstitious, came over her. What did it all mean? Good Mr. Pennithorne in his innocence had spoken to her of John, and that very day John’s children had arrived; he had spoken of Randolph, and Randolph was here. Was it fate, or some mysterious influence unknown? She was so startled that she forgot to go through the ordinary formulas of seeming welcome, and said nothing but his name.

“Yes; I hope you are well,” he said, holding out his hand; “and that my father is well. I thought I would come and see how you were all getting on.”

“It is a long time since you have been here,” she said. What could she say? She

was not glad to see him, as a sister ought to be. And then there was a pause.

The children stood staring open-mouthed while these chill greetings were said. ("I wonder who it is?" said Liliias, under her breath. "It is the one who is a little, a very little, like papa." "It is a—gentleman," said Nello. "Oh you silly, silly little boy! not to know that at the very first; but Mary is not very glad to see him," said the little girl.)

Mary did not even ask her visitor to come in; he stood still at the door, looking round him with watchful, unfriendly eyes. This was not a place for any one to come who was not tender of Mary, and of whosoever she might shelter there. She did not want him in that special place.

"Shall we go round to the house?" she said; "my father ought to know that you are here, and he never comes into the hall."

"I am very well where I am," Randolph said. "I know it was always a favourite place with you. Do not change your sitting-room for me. You have it in very nice order, Mary. I see you share the popular passion for art furnishing; and children too! This is something more novel still. Who are the

children, may I ask ? They are visitors from the neighbourhood I suppose ? ”

“ No,” she said, faltering still more, “ they are not visitors—they—belong to us——.” Mary could not tell how it was that her lips trembled, and she hesitated to pronounce the name. She made an effort at last and got it out with difficulty. “ They are—John’s children.”

“ John’s children ! here is a wonderful piece of news,” said Randolph ; but she saw by his countenance that it was no news. Howsoever he had heard it, Mary perceived in a moment not only that he knew, but that this was his real errand here. He stood with the appropriate gesture of one struck dumb with amazement ; but he was not really surprised, only watchful and eager. This made his sister more nervous than ever.

“ Children,” she said, “ come here—this is your uncle Randolph ; come and speak to him.” Mary was so much perplexed that she could not see what was best to do—whether to be anxiously conciliatory and convince Randolph in spite of himself, without seeming to notice his opposition, or to defy him ; the former, however, was always the safest way. He did not make any advance, but stood with

a half-smile on his face, while the children drew near with suspicious looks.

“It is the—gentleman who is—a little—not very much, just a little, like papa,” said Lilias, going forward, but slowly, and with that look of standing on the defensive which children unconsciously adopt to those they do not trust.

Nello hung on to her skirts, and did as she did, regarding the stranger with cloudy eyes. Randolph put out his hand coldly to be shaken; his smile broadened into a half-laugh of amusement and contempt.

“So they are said to be his children, are they?”

“They *are* his children,” said Mary.

Randolph shrugged his shoulders and laughed. “They look like foreigners anyhow,” he said. “My father, I suppose, is delighted. It must be a new experience both for him and you.”

“Go away, my darlings, go to Martuccia; you see I have some business with—this gentleman.” She could not again repeat the title she had given him. When the curious little spectators had gone, she turned to Randolph, who stood watching their exit, with an anxiety she did not attempt to conceal. “For

Heaven's sake do not talk to my father about them ! I ask it as a favour. He consents tacitly that they should be here, but he takes no notice of them. Do not call his attention to them. It is the only thing I ask of you."

He looked at her fixedly still, with that set smile on his face with which he had looked at the children.

"I am scarcely the person to be called upon to make things smooth with my father," he said. "Come, come ; my father is old, and can be made to believe anything, let us allow. But what do you mean by it, Mary, what do *you* mean ? You were never any friend to me."

"Friend to *you* ! I am your sister, Randolph, though you don't seem to remember it much. And what have you to do with it ?" asked Mary, with a certain amount of exasperation in her voice ; for of all offensive things in the world there is none so offensive as this pretence of finding you out in a transparent deception. Mary grew red and hot in spite of herself.

"I have a great deal to do with it. I have not only my own interests to take care of, but my boy's. And why you should prefer to us,

about whom there can be no doubt, these little impostors, these supposed children of John——”

“ Randolph,” said Mary, with tears in her eyes, “there is no supposing about them. Oh don’t go against us and against truth and justice! They brought me a letter from their father. There was no room to doubt, no possibility. John himself is most unfortunate——”

“ Unfortunate! that is not the word I should use.”

“ But why remember it against *them*, poor little things, who have done no harm? Oh, Randolph, I have never been otherwise than your friend when I had the chance. Be mine now! There are a hundred things about which I want to consult you. You have a family of your own; you have been trained to it; you know how to take care of children. I wanted to ask your advice, to have your help——”

“ Do you think me a fool then,” he cried, “as silly as yourself? that you try to get *me* to acknowledge this precious deception, and give you my support against myself? Why should I back you up in a wicked contrivance against my own interests?”

“What is it you mean? Who has been guilty of wicked contrivances?” cried Mary, aghast. She gazed at him with such genuine surprise that he was arrested in his angry vituperation, and changed his tone to one of mockery, which affected her more.

“Well,” he said, “let us allow that it is your first attempt, Mary, and that is why you do it so clumsily. The mistakes good people make when they first attempt to do badly are touching. Villany, like everything else, requires experience. But it is too funny to expect *me* to be the one to stand up for you, to persuade my father to believe you.”

“Oh,” she said, clasping her hands, “do you think this is what I ask? It is you who mistake, Randolph. It has never occurred to my father, or any one else, not to believe. He never doubted any more than I was capable of doubting. I will show you John’s letter.”

Randolph put up his hand, waving off the suggested proof.

“It is quite unnecessary. I am not to be taken in by such simple means. You forget I have a stake in it—which clears the judgment. And I warn you, Mary, that I am here to look after my personal interests, not

to foist any nondescript brat into the family. I give you notice—it is not to help your schemes, it is for my own interests I am here."

"What do interests mean?" she said, wondering. "Your own interests!—what does *that* mean? I know *I* have none."

"No—it cannot make much difference to you whatever happens; therefore you are free to plot at your leisure. I understand that fully; but, my dear, *I* am here to look after myself—and my boy. You forget I have an heir of my own."

Mary looked at him with a dulness of intelligence quite unusual to her. There are things in the most limited minds which genius itself could not divine. The honourable and generous, and the selfish and grasping, do not know what each other mean. They are as if they spoke a different language. And her brother was to Mary as if he veiled his meaning in an unknown tongue. She gazed at him with a haze of dulness in her eyes. What was it he intended to let her know? Disbelief of her, a suggestion that she lied! and something more—she could not make out what, as the rule of his own conduct. He looked at her, on the other hand, with an air

of penetration, a clever consciousness of seeing through and through her and her designs, which excited Mary to exasperation. How could they ever understand each other with all this between ?

“ I am going to see my father,” said Randolph ; “ that of course is the object of my visit ; I suppose he will not refuse to keep me for a day or two. And in the meantime why should we quarrel ? I only warn you that I come with my eyes open, and am not to be made a dupe of. Good-bye for the present—we shall meet no doubt at dinner the best of friends.”

Mary stood still where he left her, and watched him as he went slowly down the slope and round the corner of the house. He was shorter than John and stouter, with that amplitude of outline which a wealthy rural living and a small parish are apt to confer. A comfortable man, fond of good living, fond of his ease ; yet taking the trouble to come here, for what ?—to baffle some supposed wicked contrivances and plots against himself. Mary remembered that Randolph had taken the great family misfortune as a special wrong to him. How dared the evil fates to interfere with his comfort or rumour to assail his name ?

He had said frankly that it could be nothing to the others in comparison. And was it once more the idea that he himself was touched, which had roused him out of his comfortable rectory to come here and assert himself? But how did the arrival of John's children affect that? Mary, in her long calm, had not entered into those speculations about the future which most people more or less think necessary when the head of the house is old. She had not asked herself what would happen when her father died, except vaguely in respect to herself, knowing that she would then in all likelihood leave the old Castle. John was the heir. Somehow or other, she did not know how, the inheritance would be taken up for him. This had been the conclusion in her mind without reason given or required. And Randolph had not come into the sphere of her imagination at all as having anything to do with it. What should he have to do with it when there was John? And even now Mary did not know and could not understand the reason of his objection to John's children. She stood and looked after him with a dull beating of pain in her heart. And as he turned round the corner of the old house towards the door, he looked back and waved his hand. The gesture

and look, she could scarcely tell why, gave her a sensation of sickening dismay and pain. She turned and went in, shutting the door in the sudden pang this gave her. And to shut the great door of the hall was the strangest thing, except in the very heart of winter. While the sun was shining and the air genial, such a thing had never happened before. It seemed in itself a portent of harm.

CHAPTER XV.

RANDOLPH.

RANDOLPH MUSGRAVE was a squire-parson, a class which possesses the features of two species without fully embodying either—which may be finer than either, the two halves of the joint character tempering each other—or may be a travesty of both, exaggerating their mutual defects. He was of the latter rather than of the former development. His living was small in one sense and large in another, the income being large, but the people few and very much given up to dissent, a fact which soured his character without moving him to exertion. He was not fond of exertion in any case, and it was all but hopeless in this. But not less was he daily and hourly irritated by the little Bethels and Salems, the lively Methodists, the pragmatical Baptists, who led his people away. They made him angry, for he was easily moved to anger, and they increased

that tendency to listen to gossip and be moved by small matters which is one of the temptations of a rural life. He had become accustomed to make much of petty wrongs, calling them insults and crimes, and perhaps to be more disposed to petty vengeances than a man who is placed in the position of an example to others ought to be ; and whereas he had always been disposed to consider himself a sacred person, above the ordinary slights of fortune, this tendency had grown and strengthened so, that every petty pin-prick was like a poisoned arrow to him. By natural laws of reverberation he heard more evil of himself, had more mishaps in the way of gossip, of receiving letters not intended for him, and otherwise surprising the sentiments of his neighbours, than almost any one else ever had —which had made him suspicious of his neighbours in the highest degree, and ready to believe every small offence a premeditated insult. This perhaps made him all the more ready to believe that his sister had conceived a villainous plan against him and his. He would not have done such a thing himself ; but was not his life full of such attempts made upon him by others ? everybody almost whom he encountered having one time or other

conspired against his hopes or happiness. But he had always found out the plots in time. It was true that this villany might be John's, of whom he would have believed anything; and Mary herself might be the dupe: but most likely it was Mary, who did not like him nor his wife, and who would no doubt be capable of anything to banish him finally from Penninghame, and set up there some creature of her own. This was the idea which had come into his mind, when he heard accidentally of the arrival which had made so much commotion in the north country. He had talked it over with his wife till they both saw gunpowder plots and conspiracies incalculable in it. "You had better go and see into it yourself," Mrs. Randolph said. "I will," was the Rector's energetic reply. "And believe nobody, believe nothing but what you see with your own eyes." "Never! I will put faith in nobody," Randolph had said. And it was in this frame of mind that he had come here. He meant to believe nobody save when they warned him of plots against himself: to trust nothing save that all the world was in a league to work him harm. But for this determined pre-conclusion, he might perhaps have been less certain of his sister's enmity to himself, and of the baseness

of the deception she was practising ; but he had no doubt whatever on this matter now. And he meant to expose her remorselessly. Why should he mince matters ? His father was an old man and might die at any moment, and this villany ought to be exposed at once.

With these thoughts in his mind he went round to the great door. How different was the grey north-country house from anything he was used to ! The thought of his snug parsonage embosomed in greenery, roses climbing to the chimney-stacks, clustering about all the windows, soft velvet lawns and strict inclosures keeping all sacred—made him shiver at sight of the irregular building, the masses of ivy fostering damp, the open approach, a common road free to everybody. If it ever was his, or rather when it was his—for these supposititious children would soon be done away with, and John, a man under the ban of the law, how could he ever appear to claim his inheritance ?—*when* it was his, he would soon make a difference. He would bring forward the boundaries of the Chase so as to inclose the Castle. He would make the road into a stately avenue as it once was and ought to be. What did it matter who objected ? He would

do it ; let the village burst with rage. The very idea of exasperating the village and making it own his power, made the idea all the more delightful. He would soon change all this ; let it but get into his hands. In the midst of these thoughts, however, Randolph met a somewhat ludicrous rebuff from Eastwood, who opened the door suddenly and softly, as was his fashion, as if he hoped to find the visitor out in something improper. "Who shall I say, sir ?" said Eastwood, deferentially. This gave Randolph a sense of the most ludicrous discomfiture ; for to be asked what name is to be announced when you knock at the door of your father's house is a curious sensation. It was nobody's fault unless it might have been Randolph's own, but the feeling was disagreeable. He stood for a moment dumb, staring at the questioner—then striding inside the door, pushed Eastwood out of his way. When he was within, however, somewhat conciliated by the alarmed aspect of the butler, who did not know whether to resist or what to do, he changed his mind.

"I don't want to startle my father," he said ; "say Mr. Randolph Musgrave has arrived."

"I beg your pardon humbly, sir," cried Eastwood.

“No, no, it was not your fault,” Randolph replied. It was not the servant’s fault ; but it was *their* fault who had made his home a place of disgrace, and no longer a fit home for him.

The Squire was seated among his books, feeling the drowsy influence of the afternoon. He had no Monograph to support his soul, and no better occupation than to rummage dully through the records of antiquity, cheered up and enlivened if he found something to reply to in *Notes and Queries*, but otherwise living a heavy kind of half-animate life. When the critiques and the letters about that Monograph had ended, what a blank there was ! and no other work was at hand to make up, or to tempt him to further exertions. The corner of land that he desired to attain had been bought, and had given him pleasure ; but after a while his eyes were satisfied with the contemplation, and his mind almost satisfied with the calculation, of so many additional acres added to the property. The sweetness of it lay in the thought that the property was growing, that there was sufficient elasticity in the family income to make the acquisition of even a little bit of land possible. The Squire

thought this was the fruit of his own self-denial, and it gave him that glow of conscious virtue which was once supposed to be the appropriate and unfailing reward of good actions, till conscious virtue went out of fashion. This was sweet ; and it was sweet to go and look at the new fields which restored the old boundary of the Penninghame estate in that direction ; but such gratifications cease to be sustaining to life after a time. And Mr. Musgrave was dull sitting among his books ; the sounds were in his ears which he was always hearing now—the far-off ring of voices that made him sensible of those inmates in his house whom he never noticed, who were to him as if they did not exist. When the mind is not very closely occupied, sounds thus heard in the house come strangely across the quiescent spirit of the solitary. Voices beloved are as music, are as sunshine, conveying a sense of happiness and soft exhilaration. Hearing them far off, though beyond the reach of hearing, so to speak, does not the very distant sound, the tone of love in them, make work sweet and the air warm, softening everything round the recluse ? But these were not voices beloved. The old man listened to them—or rather, not permitting himself to listen, *heard* them

acutely through the mist of a separation which he did not choose to overcome. They were like something from another world, voices in the air, inarticulate, mysterious, known yet unknown. He turned the leaves idly when these strange suggestions came to him in his solitude ; he had nothing to do with them, and yet so much. This was how he was sitting, dully wistful, in that stillness of age which when it is not glad must be sad, and hearing almost, as if he were already a ghost out of his grave, the strange yet familiar stir in the unseen stairs and passages, the movements of the kindly house——.

“Mr. Randolph Musgrave !” The Squire was very much startled by the name. He rose hastily, and stood leaning upon his writing-table to see who it was that followed Eastwood into the room after a minute’s interval. It seemed scarcely possible to him that it could be his son. “Randolph !” he said. The children’s voices had made him think, in spite of himself, of the time—was it centuries ago ? —when there were two small things running about those old passages continually, and a beautiful young mother smiling upon them—and him. This had softened his heart, though by means which he would not have acknowledged.

He looked out eagerly with a sensation of pleasure and relief for his son. He would (perhaps) take Randolph's advice, perhaps get some enlightenment from him. But the shock set his nerves off, and made him tremulous, though it was a shock of pleasure ; and it hurt his pride so to be seen trembling, that he held himself up strained and rigid against his table. "Randolph ! you are a stranger indeed," he said, and his countenance lighted up with a cloudy and tremulous smile.

"Strange that he was never seen here before in my time," said Eastwood as he withdrew. "I've seen a many queer things in families, but never nothing more queer than this—two sons as never have been seen in the house, and children as the Squire won't give in he owns them. I thought he'd have walked right straight over little master Saturday last as if no one was there. But I don't like the looks of 'im. When he's master here I march, and that I can tell you—pretty fast, Missis Cook."

"Mr. Randolph ? He'll never be master here, thank God for it," said Cook with pious fervour, "or more than you will go.")

"Yes," said Randolph, walking in, "I have been a stranger, but how can we help that ! It

is life that separates us. We must all run our own course. I hope you are well, sir. You look well—for your time of life."

It is not a pleasant thing to be told that you look well for your time of life—unless indeed you are ninety, and the time of life is itself a matter of pride. The Squire knew he was old, and that soon he must resign his place to others ; but he did not care for such a distinct intimation that others thought so too.

"I am very well," he said, curtly. "You are so completely a stranger, Randolph, that I cannot make the usual remarks on your personal appearance. You deny me the opportunity of judging if you look ill or well."

"Ah," said Randolph, "that is just what I said. We must all run our own course. My duties are at the other end of England, and I cannot be always running back and forward ; but I hope to stay a few days now if you will have me. Relations should see each other now and then. I have just had a glimpse of Mary in the old hall as usual. She did not know me at first, nor, I daresay, if I had not seen her there, should I have known her"—

"Mary is little changed," said the Squire.

"So you think, sir, seeing her every day ; but there is a great change from what she was

ten years ago. She was still a young woman then, and handsome. I am afraid even family partiality cannot call her anything but an old maid now."

Mr. Musgrave did not make any reply. He was not a particularly affectionate father, but Mary was part of himself, and it did not please him to hear her spoken of so.

"And, by the bye," said Randolph, "how did such a thing happen I wonder? for she *was* handsome;—handsome and well-born, and with a little money. It is very odd she never has married. Was there anything to account for it? or is it mere ill-luck?"

"Ill-luck to whom?" said the Squire. "Do you think perhaps your sister never had the chance, as people say? You may dismiss that idea from your mind. She has had enough of chances: I don't know any reason; but there must have been one, I suppose. Either that nobody came whom she cared for, or—I really cannot form any other idea," he concluded, sharply. It was certain that he would not have Mary discussed.

"I meant no harm," said Randolph. "She has got the old hall very nicely done up. It is not a place I would myself care to keep up, if the Castle were in my hands; but she has

made it very nice. I found her there with—among her favourite studies,” he added, after a momentary pause. It was too early to begin direct upon the chapter of the children, he felt. The Squire did not show any sign of special understanding. He nodded his head in assent.

“ She was always fond of the hall,” he said. “ I used to think she suited it. And now that she is—past her youth, as you say —”

“ Well into middle age I say, sir, like other people ; which is a more serious affair for a woman than for a man ; but I suppose all hopes are over now. She is not likely to marry at her time of life.” This was the second time he had mentioned the time of life. And the Squire did not like it ; he answered curtly—

“ No, I don’t think it likely that Mary will marry. But yourself, Randolph, how are things going with you ? You have not come so far merely to calculate your sister’s chances. Your wife is well, I hope ; and your boy ? ”

“ Quite well. You are right in thinking, sir, that I did not come without an object. We are all getting on in life. I thought it only proper that there should be some understanding among us as to family affairs—something

decided in case of any emergency. We are all mortal——”

“ And I the most mortal of all, you will say, at my ‘time of life,’ Randolph,” said the Squire, with a smile, which was far from genial. “ I daresay you are quite right, perfectly right. I am an old man, and nobody can tell what an hour may bring forth.”

“ That is true at every age,” said Randolph, with professional seriousness. “ The idea ought to be familiar to the youngest among us. In the midst of life we are in death. I recommend everybody over whom I have the least influence to settle their affairs, so that they may not leave a nest of domestic contentions behind them. It is only less important than needful spiritual preparation, which of course should be our first care.”

“ Just so,” said Mr. Musgrave. “ I presume you don’t mean to bring me to book on that point?”

“ Certainly not, sir—unless there is any special point upon which I could be of use; but you are as well able to judge as I am, and have access to all the authorities,” said Randolph with dignity. “ Besides, there is your own clergyman at hand, who is no doubt quite equal to the duties of his position.

It is old Pennithorne, is it not?" he added, with a momentary lapse into a more familiar tone. "But there is no question of that. In such matters a man of your experience, sir, ought to be able to instruct the best of us."

"The bench of bishops even," said the Squire, "sometimes I think I could—at my time of life. But that is not the question, as you say."

"No, indeed—not to say that my best advice in every way is at your service, sir; but I thought very likely it would be an ease to your mind to see me, to give me any instructions or directions—in short, to feel that your nearest representative understood your wishes, whatever might happen."

Now Randolph was evidently his father's representative, John being out of the question; and that John was absolutely out of the question, not only from external circumstances, but from the strong prejudice and prepossession against him in his father's mind, was certain. Yet the Squire resented this assumption as much as if John had been his dearly-beloved son and apparent heir.

"Thanks," he said, "I feel your care for my comfort—but after all, you are not my direct representative."

“Sir!” cried Randolph, reddening, “need I remind you of the disabilities, the privation of all natural rights——”

“You need not remind me of anything,” said Mr. Musgrave, getting up hurriedly. “I don’t care to discuss that question—or anything else of the kind. Suppose we go and join Mary, who must be in the drawing-room, I suppose? It is she, after all, who is really my representative, knowing everything about my affairs.”

“She—is a woman,” said Randolph, with a tone of contempt.

“That is undeniable—but women are not considered exactly as they used to be in such matters.”

“I hope, sir,” said the clergyman, with dignity, “that neither my sister nor you add your influence to the foolish movement about women’s rights.”

“Do you mean that Mary does not want a vote?” said the Squire. “No, I don’t suppose it has occurred to her. We add our influence to very few public movements, Randolph, bad or good. The Musgraves are not what they once were in the county; the leading part we once took is taken by others who are richer than we are. Progress is not

the thing for old families, for progress means money.”

“There are other reasons why the Musgraves do not take their proper place. I have hopes, sir,” said Randolph, “that under more favourable circumstances—if we, perhaps, were to draw more together——”

“What do you mean, sir?” said the Squire; “it was you who separated yourself from us, not us from you. You were too good, being a clergyman, as you said, to encounter the odium of our position. That’s enough, Randolph. It is not an agreeable subject. Let us dismiss it as it has been dismissed these fifteen years; and come—to Mary’s part of the house.”

“Then, am I to understand,” said Randolph, sharply, rising, yet holding back, “that your mind is changing as old age gains upon you, that you are going to accept the disgrace of the family? and that it is with your sanction that Mary is receiving—adopting——”

He stopped, overawed in spite of himself, by the old man’s look, who stood with his face fixed looking towards him, restraining with all his force the tremor of his nerves. The Squire had been subject all his life to sudden fits of passion, and had got the habit of subduing, by ignoring them, as all his family well knew.

He made no reply, but the restrained fire in his eyes impressed even the dull imagination of his son, who was pertinacious rather than daring, and had no force in him to stand against passion. Mr. Musgrave turned round quickly, and took up his book, which lay on a table near.

“ Mary sent you a copy of the Monograph ? ” he said ; “ but I don’t remember that you gave me your opinion of it. It has had a very flattering reception generally. I could not have expected so much interest in the public mind on a question of such exclusive family interest. But so it has been. I have kept all the notices, and the letters I have received on the subject. You shall see them by and by ; and I think you will agree with me, that a more flattering reception could scarcely have been. All sorts of people have written to me. It appears,” said the Squire, with modest pride, “ that I have really been able to throw some light upon a difficulty. After dinner, Randolph, if you are interested, you shall see my collection.”

“ My time is short,” said Randolph, “ and with so many more serious matters to discuss——”

“ I know few things more serious than the

history of the family honours," said the Squire, "especially as you have a boy to inherit the old blazon; but we'll go into all that this evening, as your stay is to be short. Better come and see Mary before dinner. She will want to know all about your home-concerns, and your wife. The house is unchanged, you will perceive," the Squire continued, talking cheerfully as he led the way; and the sound of his voice, somewhat high-pitched and shrill with age, travelled far through the old passages. "I hope no sacrilegious hands will ever change the house. My heirs may add to it if they please, but it is a monument of antiquity, which ought never to be touched—except to mend it delicately as Mary mends her old lace. This way, Randolph; I believe you have forgotten the way."

They were standing in an angle of the fine oak staircase, where the Squire waited till his son came up to him. At this moment a rush of small footsteps, and a whispering voice—"Run, Nello, Nello! he is coming," was audible above. Randolph looked up quickly, with a look of intelligence, into the old man's face. But the Squire did not move a muscle. His countenance was blank as that of a deaf man. If he had heard, he allowed no sign of

hearing to be visible. "Come along," he said, "it seems to me that my wind is better than yours even at my time of life," with a half-sarcastic smile. Was he hard of hearing? a hypothesis rather agreeable to think of; or what was the meaning of it? Were these obnoxious children the pets of the house? but why should they run because he was coming? The hostile visitor was perplexed, and could not make it out. He followed into the drawing-room without a word, while the small footsteps were still audible. Mary was seated at a low table on which there was work, but she was not working. She rose to receive them with a certain formality; for except after dinner, when the Squire would sometimes come for a cup of tea, or when there were visitors in the house, she was generally alone in the low quaint drawing-room, which transported even the unimaginative Randolph back to childhood. The panelled walls, the spindle-legged furniture, the inlaid cabinets and tables, were all exactly as he remembered them. This touched him a little, though he had all the robustness against impression which fortifies a slow intelligence. "It seems like yesterday that I was here," he said.

This, in her turn, touched Mary, whose

excitement made her subject to the lightest flutter of emotion. She smiled at him with greater kindness than she had yet felt. "Yes," she said. "I feel so, sometimes, too, when I look round ; but it tells less upon us who are here always. And so much has happened since then."

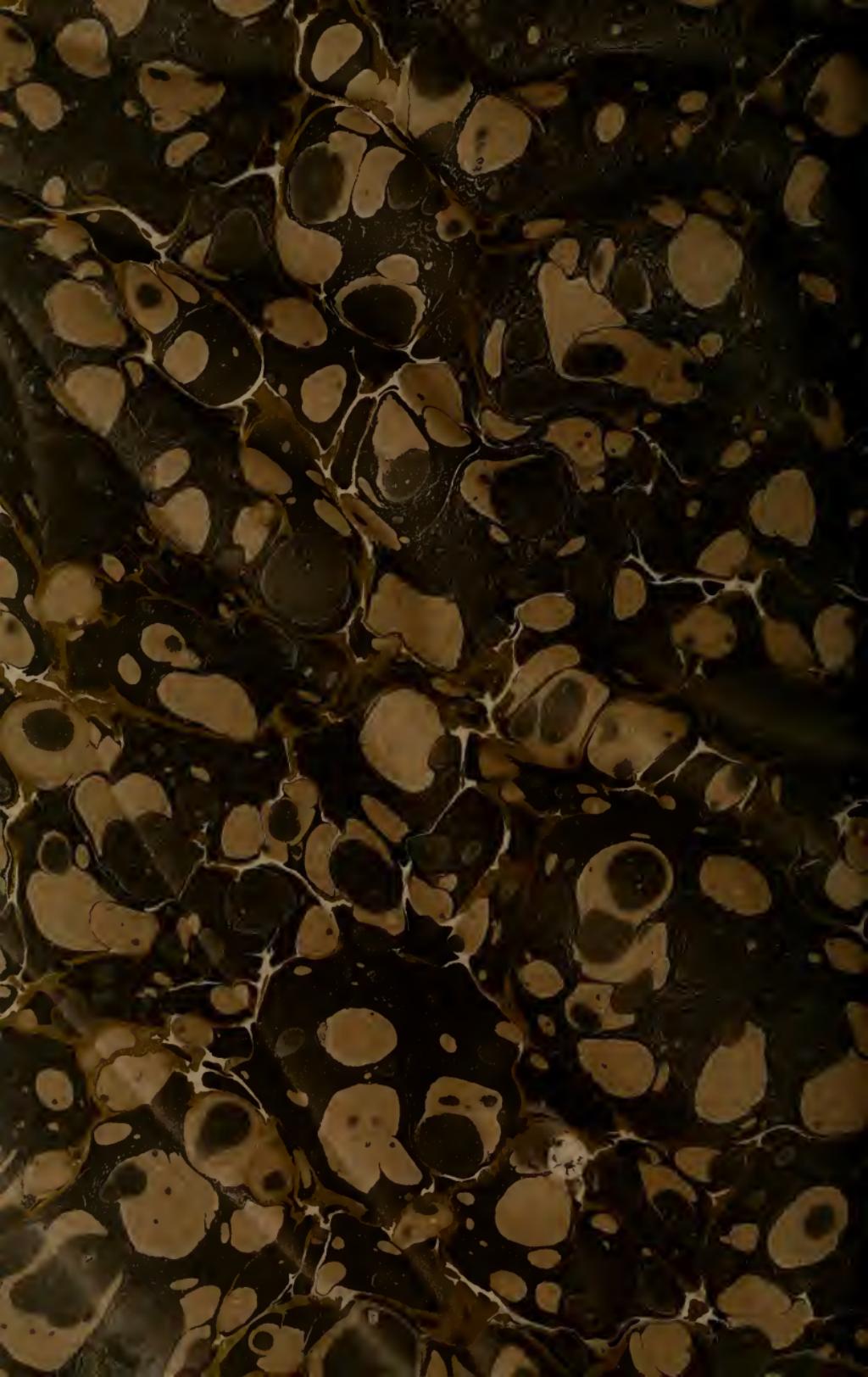
"Ah, I suppose so: though you seem to vegetate pretty much in the old ways. Those children though, for instance," said Randolph, with a laugh, "scurrying off in such haste as we came within hearing, that is not like the old ways. Are you ashamed of them, or afraid to have them here ? I should not wonder, for my part."

The tears sprang to Mary's eyes. She did not say anything in the sudden shock, but looked at Randolph piteously with a silent reproach. It was the first time since the day of their arrival that any public mention had been made of the children in her father's presence. And there was a pause which seemed to her full of fate.

"You must not look at me so," said her brother. "I gave you fair warning. My father is not to be given up to your plots without a remonstrance at least. I believe it is a conspiracy, sir, from beginning to end.

Do you intend our old family, with all the honours you are so proud of, to drop into disgrace? With the shadow of crime on it," cried Randolph, warming into excitement; then, with a dull perception of something still more telling, his father's weak point, "and the bar sinister of vice?" he said.

END OF VOL. I.





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